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FINDING LOVE IN A SHOEBOX

Boy sent Christmas shoebox to girl in the Philippines, they wed 14 years later

BY MARK ELLIS

Many people have stuffed a shoebox full of goodies for Operation Christmas Child, a project to bless children around the world run by Samaritan's Purse. But for one seven-year-old boy in Idaho, it led to a surprising outcome many years later.

In 2000, Tyrel Wolfe packed a shoebox with gifts for a young girl his age and added a photo of himself wearing cowboy attire, holding a lariat.

After he turned in his shoebox at church he never gave much thought to the girl who received it 7,000 miles away.

Joana Marchan received the shoebox at a vacation Bible school in a suburb of Manila.



Not only was a photo of Tyrel included, but also his address.

Joana was thrilled to receive the shoebox.

She wrote a thank you letter to express her appreciation, but it got lost in the mail.

Eleven years later Joana decided to use Facebook to see if she could find the boy who packed her box.

She searched for his name and got one hit in Idaho.

She took a chance and submitted a friend request.

But Tyrel had never heard of Joana Marchan, so he ignored the request.

Two years later, Joana sent another friend request.

This time, Tyrel sent Joana a message asking how she knew him.

She replied, telling him that he was the one who sent her a shoebox in 2000.

As the two got to know each other online, they discovered they shared a common faith in Jesus Christ and even enjoyed some of the same music.

Tyrel decided he wanted to meet Joana, but had to work to save money for a plane ticket.

After his graduation from high school, he flew to Manila a month later.

He had been on Christian mission trips before, but had never been to Asia and had never traveled by himself.

It was an emotional meeting. When Joana first saw Tyrel she burst into tears.

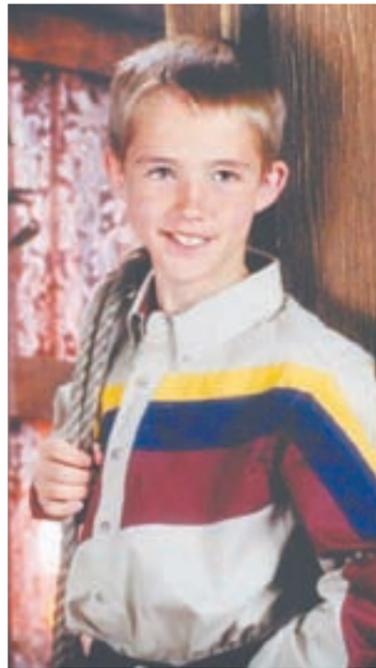
"When I finally got there and saw her, I had to punch myself a couple times because I thought it was a dream," he told *People Magazine*.

"I was immediately attracted to her."

Tyrel instantly noticed a gap between his way of life and the more modest lifestyle of Joana's family in the Philippines.

All eight members of her family slept on the floor of their 10x19-foot house. Prior to the trip, they had agreed not to officially date until Tyrel had asked her father's permission in person.

Midway through his visit he asked her dad, who happened to be a pastor. He quickly agreed.



Tyrel Wolfe sent Joana Marchan an Operation Christmas Child gift when they were children.

“I thought it was a dream.”

"I wanted to spend every moment I could with Joana while I was there, because once I left I didn't know what would happen next," Tyrel told *People*.

Tyrel sensed that Joana was the one for him. After he got back to Idaho, he began to work and save so he could go back to visit.

They stayed in touch via Facebook, and Skyped with each other often before Tyrel returned to the Philippines again in November.

This time he stayed for a month. On his second trip, he asked her father for permission to marry Joana.

The couple held an engagement party in the Philippines and obtained a fiancée visa for Joana.

On October 5, 2014 they got married outdoors on Tyrel's parents' 400-acre cattle ranch in Midvale, Idaho.

The groom wore a traditional shirt often worn by Filipino grooms.

As a special touch, wedding guests were asked if they would pack an Operation Christmas Child shoebox and bring it to the wedding.

The couple decided to live full-time in the USA because the job prospects were better for Tyrel.

"It was a big change and adjustment for me," Joana told *People*.

"I was raised in the city and now I'm living in the country with much less people and more space, but it's a beautiful place."

In June they were blessed with the birth of a baby boy.

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Fun for Kids Pages 5, 6, 7

BACK PAGE

MY SCARS DON'T DEFINE ME

WAYNE SIMMONS



How to cope with festive funk

BY RUSTY WRIGHT

'TIS the season to be... gloomy?

Feeling low this Christmas season? You're not alone. Amid cheery songs, festive parties, gifts and good wishes, many lonely people are crying or dying on the inside. Maybe you're one of them. I was. During a horrible year, my wife of 20 years divorced me, my employer of 25 years fired me, and I had a cancer scare.

As I drove home one night, lovely Christmas music came on the radio. Melancholy aching evidenced the deep pain of abandonment and loss that I was still processing. No fun.

Blue Christmas
Romantic estrangement, family strife, and bereavement can make your holidays dismal. One of Elvis Presley's most popular songs was *Blue Christmas*. A lonely crooner mourns heartbreaking lost

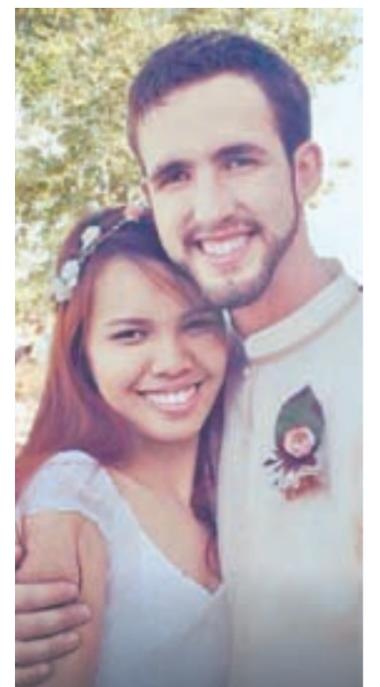


love. Performers from The Beach Boys to Celine Dion, Loretta Lynn, and Jon Bon Jovi have recorded it. Several factors can produce Christmas blues. Hectic activity can bring physical and emotional stress. Overspending can produce financial pressure. Year-end reflection and focus on loss can magnify sorrow.

McGill University psychologist Dr Michael Spevack notes, "Over eating and over drinking combined with a decreased amount of sleep is also a formula for extreme emotional swings." Depression can lead to thoughts of suicide, especially among the socially isolated, he says.

The empty chair
Is your family apart this season by necessity or choice? Maybe an "empty chair" reminds you of your pain. Does Christmas "Ho, Ho, Ho" contrast with your deep anguish?

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Tyrel and Joana are now married and living in the USA.

MY LIFE-CHANGING CHRISTMAS

Martin Daryl Hendricks faced bullying, rejection and identity issues as a child, which had a big impact on him as he grew up. At the age of 39, he found himself broken and alone after his second wife left him. Then that Christmas he had a wakeup call like no other – he was shot at and narrowly escaped with his life. Desperate for change, he took some advice his mother gave him.

Martin describes himself as a young child as happy, funny and full of smiles.

"I loved playing in our backyard," he recalls. "I truly enjoyed school and completed it without failing any grade."

Martin's father abandoned his family, which caused other students to tease him.

"I hated bullying in school and would fight anyone trying to bully me. I felt really rejected when they teased me about my father not stay-

ing with us." Martin remembers struggling with his identity as a teenager. Despite being a good student, in high school he started skipping school and abused alcohol.

"I played games and would steal small items like chocolate. I would chase girls and indulge in sexual immorality and break hearts because of my first girlfriend who cheated on me."

Martin grew up attending church but, "I did not live according to Jesus' teachings and fell on hard times and many troubles due to double standards."

He admits as time went on he lived a hypocritical lifestyle and believed he was better than his "sinner friends".

"I married and divorced twice. Anger and hate filled my heart for people who hurt me emotionally or physically, and thought I was wise in my own eyes."



Martin Hendricks with his wife Pulane.

Coffee Break

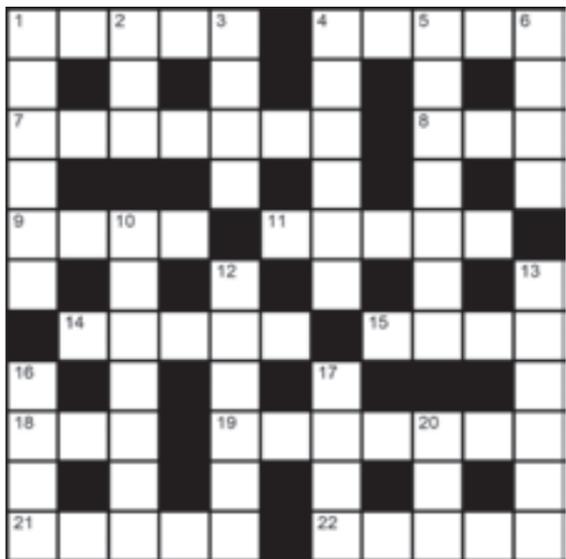
CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- Shoe size factor
- Maintain a subscription
- Sickly pale
- Pole for an angler
- Sax relative
- Tendon
- Sarcastic sort, scoffer
- Keyboarder's goof
- Once around the track
- What's left
- Large fire
- Hostile force

DOWN

- Implement of combat
- Paternity identifier
- Cannabis fibre
- Shrink, as from a snake?



- Infant's room
- The whole ___ world
- Original Olympics site
- Ferocious, savage
- Tragedy's opposite
- Spill the beans
- Land at sea
- Food colouring

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



5				6	4			3
3						2		
				9	1			8
	4	2						6
9				4				2
1						7	3	
2			5	1				
		3						1
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No one could understand me."

When Martin's second wife left him and their baby boy for another man, he fell into a depression.

"I remembered my mother's words: 'God has a plan for your life – go back to Jesus.'"

Martin knew it was time to surrender his life to Christ.

"At Christmas, 2010, some guys almost shot me dead and I was grateful to be alive... I went to stay at my mother's place on New Year's Eve, 2010. She prayed with me and I promised God if He gave me a last chance I would serve Him until I died. On January 1st I rededicated my life to Jesus at a church in Braamfisherville."

Martin says his life has completely

changed since then.

"I no longer tell lies or steal anyone's goods. I have made peace with God and reconciled with my heavenly Father. I have forgiven everyone, including my father for abandoning us when we needed him the most. I now serve Jesus from a genuine love for Him and have a relationship with God like never before... The best part about being a Christian is knowing God will work everything out for my good over time. God has been so good these 13 years and His love makes me love everyone."

Martin is now 51 and works as a pastoral and maintenance officer. His favourite Bible verse is Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but

Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loves me and gave Himself for me."

"I have learnt only one thing matters most; my relationship with Christ Jesus, my Savior and Redeemer," Martin attests. "I want everyone to know that spending time and giving attention to Christ Jesus now is vitally important. I am so grateful that Christ Jesus did not give up on me and thankful that He's kept me all these years, since I was born."

Martin has been happily married to Pulane for seven years.

"She serves God with me, together with my 15-year-old boy in the ministry the Lord has given us," Martin says. "Praise the Lord!"

Was it an angel?

BY DAHLIA GONZALEZ

Her Christmas Eve hope was to die in the hospital and put an end to the endless pain from Crohn's disease.

Then a Jamaican dietitian showed up and prayed for Cassidy Kellagher, and her Christmas gift was to wake up without pain for the first time in many months.

Before coming to the Lord, Cassidy was strongly anti-Christian to the point she wouldn't even say "Bless you" when somebody sneezed.

By her own account, she was "an extreme atheist, an extreme vegan, pansexual and an egotistical, terrible person." She marched in gay pride parades and handed out veggie dogs to Senators with PETA.

"I wouldn't eat with anybody who ate meat," she says. "I just went out of my way to shame people who didn't believe what I believed in."

In June 2019 Cassidy began to have severe stomach aches. She soon went to the ER and got a CAT scan and was diagnosed with Crohn's disease. In the space of three months, she lost 60 pounds. Doctors pumped her with pain meds to alleviate the excruciating pain.

"Nothing was working," she says.

She dwindled down to 80 pounds and after six months wished to die.

"I wanted to kill myself," she says. "I woke up and hated my existence. I hated every second of it. I had no hope. I lost my personal life."

Then Christmas Eve came, and the pain was so intense that Cassidy asked her mother to take her back to the hospital.

"I felt like it was going to be my last day on Earth," she says. "I was excited, like no more pain, no more tears. Let's do it."

But she didn't die. On Christmas she woke up and met the Jamaican dietitian. She had never seen her before, which was strange because she had been in and out of the hospital so often, she thought she knew everybody. She didn't pay too much attention initially.

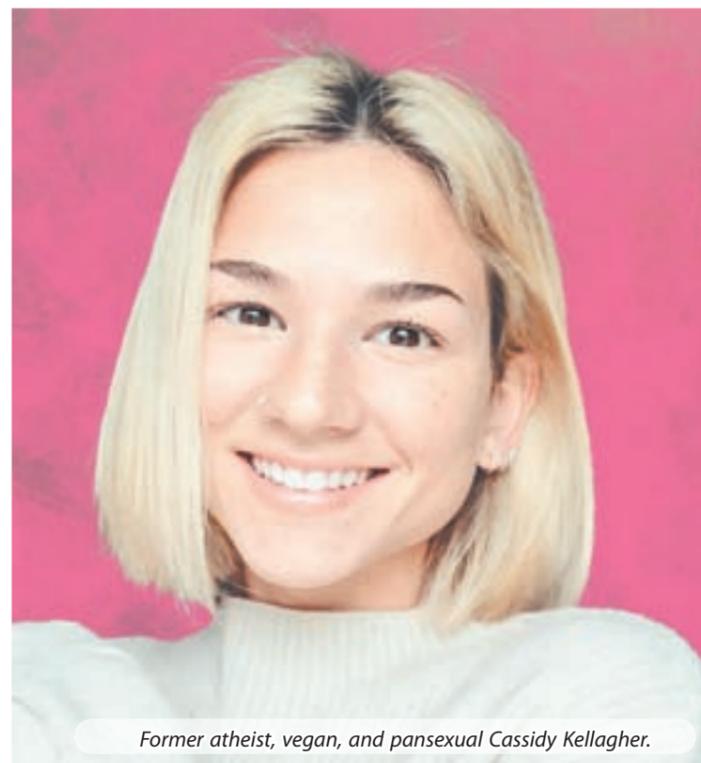
For the first time in a long time, Cassidy broke down in tears, which was strange because "I didn't really have any emotions at that time. I was pretty much a vegetable just waiting to die," she remembers.

The dietitian broke hospital protocol and told Cassidy she was going to pray for her – a decision Cassidy resisted with all the strength she could muster in her weakened condition. But since the lady insisted, Cassidy relented.

"She had so much passion for me," Cassidy recalls. "You will be healed and you will be a healer," the woman told her.

The day after Christmas, Cassidy woke up and no longer felt any pain. As a matter of fact, she felt so good she wanted to be released from the hospital, which staff wouldn't allow.

Her mother was mystified. What happened? Cassidy



Former atheist, vegan, and pansexual Cassidy Kellagher.

didn't know but responded: "I have a light in me."

After her condition dramatically improved, she was released the following day.

Since the pain had left her, Cassidy went back to her old ways of sleeping around and partying. She was still trying to fill a void in her heart. A friend of hers was Buddhist, and so she got some Buddhist tattoos.

Then Covid hit, and Cassidy went into lockdown. During this time, she really meditated on her life. She remembered the "beautiful" Jamaican lady who laid hands on her at the hospital to pray. She realized that the lady had jeopardized her job by inserting prayer into the professional context.

Her curiosity piqued; Cassidy searched the hospital's directory for her. She remembered that she had never seen the Jamaican lady prior to the Christmas visit. Among the staff, there was no Jamaican dietitian. As she pondered, Cassidy came to a startling conclusion.

"It was an angel sent from God," she says. "I had to admit that there was no physical way that I could have woken up the next day with no pain."

She put her faith in Christ and committed to follow Him. Today, she continues to serve the Lord and tells other people about Him.

Cassidy still has health issues, but she is grateful for life and for the love God has poured on her.

"I can tell you with all of my might it is so much better with the Lord by your side," she says. "I didn't deserve His love, I deserve hell. I actively shamed Christians, I actively went against His kingdom ... He still had hope for me. I lost all hope, I lost everything and He still saw something in me. He still loved me. Even through these hospital times and in these deep struggles I still see His hands the whole time."

"He has filled the void!"

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Walking free

BY EMILY ANDREWS

In 1983, Melvin approached the doors of a Christian church meeting, looking to ask the “church people” for money. A large church service at a Tulsa, Oklahoma, campground was not the young man’s usual scene. When he wasn’t working odd jobs in welding and construction, he often spent his afternoons at a local bar, swapping stories with a friend over drinks. “I remember going into the big arena, and I felt this electricity in the air, and it just hit me,” Melvin remembers. “I was just like, ‘Wow.’ I didn’t understand what this was, and I wanted to get away, but I couldn’t get away.”

He lingered to hear the preacher’s message. When the service ended, a friendly couple took him to dinner. They prayed with Melvin and gave him some Gospel tracts and a Bible. As Melvin began to leave, the husband shook his hand and slipped him a \$10 bill.

From there, Melvin headed to the bar. He tossed the Bible and tracts in some bushes along the way. He made it another block and then felt drawn to look back.

He says that staring at the bushes, he heard a voice repeating, “Don’t leave me here.”

Melvin ignored the plea and continued down his original path – both to the bar, and further into his addiction.

Eight months later, he sat in a jail cell facing a felony murder charge.

Filling the void

Before moving to Oklahoma with his family, Melvin grew up in a predominantly Hispanic community near Los Angeles.

As a child, he figured he was Hispanic like most of his friends, only to find out later that his family were members of the Muskogee people.

Melvin associated Native Americans with losing wars in the movies. And back then, he wanted nothing more than to win – to secure a sense of identity, to excel in sports, to earn his parents’ affection.

His family met his practical needs, a roof over their heads and food on the table. But showing emotion wasn’t commonplace at home.

Melvin doesn’t remember receiving hugs or hearing “I love you.”

He sniffed glue for the first time after seeing his older brother try it.

He began smoking cigarettes with his dad and sneaking beers from the fridge, undeterred by the knowledge of his dad’s alcoholism. Later, he tried marijuana.

“I was looking to fill a hole in my life,” he says. “Something was missing not only because of God, but because of the lack of emotional expression in my family. I thought I needed something to fill what they weren’t filling.”

A broken spirit

By his early 20s, Melvin had a son and a daughter by two different women. But he showed no signs of settling down. At age 23, while drunk and high at a party, he was arrested for his part in a murder. While he didn’t commit the act that night, he didn’t try to stop the incident and was implicated.

When Melvin arrived at county jail, his mother gave him a small Bible.

At first, he set it aside, but he tried crying out for Jesus to save him from his crisis.

He was convicted and received a life sentence, and he went to prison convinced Jesus had nothing to offer him.

When volunteers and fellow prisoners tried to tell Melvin the Gospel (the good news that Jesus had died for his sins), he wanted no part of it.

Sometimes, he physically assaulted the prisoners who tried to share their faith.

He spent many years making himself a leader of the native population in his prison and crusading against the Christian

faith. He told his Muskogee brothers, “You can’t become a Christian. You can’t live with Jesus. Why? Because he’s not for us. He’s from other people. He’s not for us.”

Later, Melvin was transferred to Oklahoma State Penitentiary. He dreaded sitting alone in a cell for 23 hours a day.

One night, he called on his grandfather in prayer, as was customary in his Native religion. Weary and broken, he pleaded for a new way to live.

Then, he received a clear response from a voice he now believes to be Jesus: “If you really believed in me, you’d believe in Jesus, because I am Jesus.”

Awakened to hope

When the sun rose in the morning, Melvin thought about the night before. He leaned over and reached for the small Bible that was collecting dust under his bunk.

He opened the book and peered out his cell window, making sure no one could see him.

Then he began to read John 1: “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*”

“I started realizing right then that God was the one that they called Jesus, that walked this Earth,” says Melvin.

“Right then I made the decision, ‘OK, I asked you to put me on a path you want me on. If it’s Jesus, then I’m going with it.’ And I surrendered right then.”

New life begins

Melvin spent the next 27 years preaching the Good News to anyone who would listen. He received death threats from opponents of his new faith, but he persevered.

Due to changes in the legal circumstances surrounding his case, Melvin walked free in November 2021, after nearly 40 years in prison. He found a church community and began to preach on occasion.

In July 2022, Melvin married his high school sweetheart Tammy, with whom he had had reconnected just before his release.

He also re-established relationships with his grown children and enjoys getting to know his grandchildren.

Melvin continues to minister to others, especially his fellow Muskogee tribe members, however he can. He and Tammy founded Native Wings Like an Eagle, a non-profit ministry serving the Oklahoma City area.

“Sometimes, I just get in the car, fill up the tank, and just drive,” he says. “I’m thinking, ‘This is freedom.’ But really, it’s not freedom – I already had freedom. Freedom is in Christ.”

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

Coping with festive funk

• From page 1

One widow recalled how she felt during the Christmas after her husband’s death: “Little mattered to me. I didn’t want to hear carols. I didn’t want to be cheered up. I didn’t want to look at perky Christmas cards. I wanted the same thing I’d wanted every day for eight months: the strength to force myself out of bed in the morning, to brush my teeth and to eat.”

One possible influence in the northern hemisphere, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), is a form of depression the medical community doesn’t completely understand. The Mayo Clinic recommends seeing your doctor if you feel down for days and have motivation problems.

Coping

How can you cope with Christmas loneliness? Some suggestions:

- ★ Spend time with people, especially positive ones who lift your spirits. Perhaps you’ll be grateful for their cheer.
 - ★ Exercise regularly and eat well.
 - ★ Budget your gift spending and stick with your budget. Prevent January bill shock.
 - ★ Talk about your feelings. Keeping them bottled up can mean anxiety, ulcers, sour disposition, and/or explosion. Need a trusted, listening friend? Try a local church.
 - ★ Give to others. Volunteer.
- Medical professor Stephen Post, PhD, is convinced that giving is essential for optimum physical and mental health in our fragmented society. He says some California physicians give volunteerism “prescriptions” to their Medicare patients.
- ★ Seek counsel. I used to be embarrassed to obtain professional counsel. Now I recommend it. We all can use good

advice navigating life’s storms.

★ Develop spiritual roots. I’m glad that before my dark days began, I had a friendship with God.

Now, I realize you may not agree with me about spiritual matters. But – with sincere respect for you – may I politely mention a few thoughts that have made sense to me, and which you might wish to consider?

Tired of friends who betray, manipulate, disrespect, or desert you? God won’t. He cares for you, values you, will listen to you and comfort you. You can trust Him. He always wants your best.

One early believer put it this way: “Since God did not spare even His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won’t God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else?”

His point: God loved us enough to send Jesus, His only Son, to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our wrong, our sins.

What a demonstration of love! I can trust a God like that. Then Jesus rose from the dead so He could live inside us and become our friend.

Your choice

Would you like to meet Jesus, the best friend you could ever have? Wouldn’t Christmas season be a great time to place your faith in him? You can tell him something like this: *Jesus, I need you. Thanks for dying and rising again for me. Please forgive me, enter my life, and give me eternal life. Help me to become good friends with you and learn to follow your lead.*

For more information or resources please see the box entitled *How do I become a Christian?* on page 11.

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities, respectively. www.RustyWright.com

“Who can add to Christmas? The perfect motive is that God so loved the world. The perfect gift is that He gave His only Son. The only requirement is to believe in Him. The reward of faith is that you shall have everlasting life.”

- Corri Ten Boom



Melvin with his wife, Tammy.

Dream instrument amazes tribe

BY MARK ELLIS

In 2013 Caleb Byerly woke up with a start and began to furiously write in his journal everything he saw in a rather unusual dream. For the previous five years, the small-town North Carolina resident had been engaged in sharing the message of the Bible with indigenous people and tribal areas in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.

"In the dream, I was standing on top of this mountain. I was looking out across the mountain, and I saw a tribe of people," he told God Reports.

"We're the Tinananon tribe," they told him. Caleb had never heard of this people group and he began to carefully observe their actions in his dream.

A tribal chief walked to the front carrying a musical instrument. Caleb happens to be an instrument maker by profession, so his eyes "zoomed in" to study the distinctive design of an instrument unlike anything he had ever seen before.

It had 30 strings going all the way around the top of a golden bowl, from the outside, crisscrossing in the middle of the instrument. "I suddenly got a full download of everything about this instrument.

"This tribal chief took the instrument and put it on the table. He took two small sticks, and he began to play this instrument. As he played the whole tribe started to dance and worship. It was as if heaven and earth just collided. After that I woke up from the dream."

God has spoken to Caleb through dreams previously, so he meticulously recorded in his journal the name of the Tinananon tribe. He made detailed drawings of the bowl, its dimensions and materials. "I feel like when God speaks to you, it's an invitation to partner and walk with God. It's not just God commanding you to do things or God just saying do this, do that. But it's the Holy Spirit inviting you into some new journey that he's calling you into. I thought that this would be a really exciting thing to follow with the Lord."

Caleb tried to find out about the Tinananon people group but no one he asked had ever heard of them. He also tried to make the instrument he had seen in the dream but couldn't figure out a process that would work.

"So, I kind of gave up on the whole dream. I felt like I had done my part. I wasn't getting anywhere. So I just kind of gave it up."

About six months later, he saw a man staring at him on a bus on the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines. They began talking. Caleb felt the Lord urge him to ask the man about the Tinananon.

The man, Manigos, explained that he was born in the Tinananon tribe. He left as a young man and went to Davao City, the largest city on the island of Mindanao. He came to know Jesus while he lived in the city, then God called him back to his tribe through a dream.

In the dream, Manigos had gone back to evangelize his people – with Caleb! "He saw me in his dream," Caleb said, "and I came and joined him. He



Caleb Byerly and his family and the instrument he made. INSET: Caleb with Chief Datu Lipatuan Suhat of the Tinananon tribe and the Salimbaa.

and I began to minister and bring the good news of Jesus to his people."

They were filled with wonder and awe at the way God brought them together. Manigos invited Caleb to visit his tribe, which Caleb agreed to do, but first he wanted to make the instrument he had seen in the dream.

"The Lord gave me divine wisdom, gave me insight on the process of what to do ... with the help of the Holy Spirit and my wife, we were able to get it. I finally made this instrument!"

He put the strings on it for the first time. "I tuned it up the way I heard it in the dream. I got the two little sticks and I started to play it. It was that same sound I heard in the dream."

Although his wife was eight months pregnant, she and Caleb both felt that he should return to the Philippines immediately, taking the instrument with him.

There Manigos took him by motorbike and on foot to the undeveloped mountainous area where the Tinananon lived.

When the chief saw the instrument he was also-

lutely astonished. He summoned other elders from the Tinananon tribe and they walked around it incredulously, pointing at it, saying "Salimbaa."

The chief informed Caleb there were different musical instruments for each of their gods. "They have the god of the tree, the god of the stone, god of the river. And they're not necessarily gods, but they believe that the one true God or the Creator has sent down angels to guard these different things."

The tribe worshipped each god with a different musical instrument but somewhere between 100 and 150 years ago, there was a tribal war and their most valuable musical instrument that worshiped the God of all gods was taken away from them – the Salimbaa.

"And when that instrument is redeemed back to them, that is going to be the sign that God is coming back again. Because God is going to come down from heaven, and He's going to call all the righteous people to Him," Caleb explained.

Their name for the God above all gods is Manama. "They started praying to Manama...and they dedicated this instrument back to God."

Caleb and Manigos stayed with the chief, Datu Lipatuan Suhat, for three days, praying with him and telling him about Jesus.

Not much changed, Caleb told God Reports. "After we left, we didn't return for a few months, but during that time, within a month or two, the chief had an encounter with Jesus, and the Lord spoke to him and he wrote everything out. That is when he gave his heart to Jesus."

On the second visit, Caleb asked Chief Suhat how he could help the tribe. "I want you to help us translate the Bible into our language," he replied.

In January 2015, Caleb arranged for Translators Association of the Philippines to meet with all 50 chiefs of the Tinananon tribe; and they agreed to let the

translators begin their project. Chief Suhat passed away in 2015, after the translation project began, only a year after Caleb arrived with the Salimbaa.

"It was amazing to see that the last year of his life, that he got to see this, and that he led a lot of his people to a place of receiving Jesus ... I saw that he was a lover of Jesus. And he led his tribe to receive Jesus. And he gave us the complete open door to bring the gospel [the good news of God's salvation]."

Since then, there have been many churches planted among the Tinananon.

"I felt like the Lord had arranged everything," Caleb says, "in such a perfect way of organizing everything, just perfect timing. It was such an amazing series of events that took place that I couldn't take any kind of credit for it."

Caleb and Gladys Byerly are the founders of Evergreen Missions. Their focus is mostly on mentoring and discipling indigenous leaders to bring the good news of Jesus to their own people.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A LIGHTHOUSE?

BY ILSE FRIIS

A LIGHTHOUSE is designed to warn the ships of dangerous rocks or shallows and show them the way they need to go. They deter ships from running aground, preventing the ship's destruction and that of their cargo, and the lives of their crew.

Now, if a lighthouse and a ship are on a collision course, who has to move?

Of course it is the ship that needs to move, otherwise it will be destroyed. The lighthouse will always be at the same spot. It is not designed to move, but to be constantly showing the way. It will always be there to protect.

As long as those rocks or shallows are there, they pose a danger; in the same way, as long as sin is present it will destroy people (i.e. always). God's Word and principles will be a lighthouse warning us of the peril we face if we do not change our course.

His lighthouse of truth shows us the way to conduct our lives and to make the best decisions. It protects us from shipwreck and keeps us safe. If we follow God's guidelines and commands we will always receive God's best for our lives. His lighthouse is there to keep us from destruction, not spoil our fun.

Proverbs 6:23 reads: Sound advice is a beacon, good teaching is a light, moral discipline is a life path.

And Proverbs 2: 6-8 says: For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints.

Don't you think the safest course is to let God's Word and principles guide your life?

You can start by praying to invite Him into your life, and asking Him to empower you to live as He directs. Then read His instruction manual (the Bible) and be guided by its light.



Caleb with the Tinananon people.



Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. – ACTS 4:12 NIV



The eye, the inner ear, and vertigo

PETER'S CORNER

HOW amazing are our eyes? For example we can look directly at something and keep it in steady view, even while moving our heads in any kind of way! Just take a video with a phone while walking, running or jumping, and compare what the camera 'sees' with what we see.

It works like this – a very simplified summary! The inner ear is our main sensor of head movements, position, and balance. It does this using the 'vestibular apparatus' made of two sets of three hair-lined semicircular canals connected to small bags. The canals are arranged at right angles to each other.

Whenever the head moves, fluid in the canals and the bags shifts and tickles the hairs, and that sends the movement information to the brain.

Then the brain triggers eye movements to exactly compensate for the head movements. It happens extremely fast!

Some eye muscles can make over 170,000 adjusting movements per day and not get tired. The whole system is an awesome example of designed micro-engineering.

The workings of this system impacted my wife who had some episodes of 'vertigo' recently. Vertigo happens like this: The hairs lining the bags are weighted with chalk crystals.

If a chalk crystal becomes detached and drifts into a semicircular canal, it interferes with the hairs and tricks them into sensing movement has occurred. The brain then commands the corresponding eye movements.

The result for my wife was seeing everything tilt quickly to the left and jump back again, over and over again, even though nothing was actually moving – except for her eyes. It now makes us so appreciate a working eye/balance system.

An eye without semicircular canals won't work.

All of the system has to be designed and built at once to be able to work. Evolution cannot do that – it is blind, deaf and dumb, and has no idea of what or how to design.

But our Creator sure knew how to create an amazing design.

The conclusion is that nothing makes sense in biology except in the light of design. Our real challenge is to accept this conclusion.

I hope these words help you, as they have me, in your journey to surely trust the Creator. I gratefully acknowledge the below reference for background information for this article. •

Peter Gurney. Our eye movements and their control: part 2. *Journal of Creation* 17(1):103–110, April 2003

Peter Mikula is a mining engineer in Kalgoorlie who loves stargazing and talking with others about Jesus.



BY ANDREW SNOWDON, CMI
CREATION MAGAZINE

At the elite Sydney Conservatorium where pianist Mike Dooley was studying, he found his enthusiasm for life and music eroded into disillusion.

"The music we were studying was very depressing," he explained.

"There was no sense of hope. It was basically reflecting the very grim state of the world... I was led into a sense of real despair."

It was during this dark period that a concert featuring JS Bach's *St John Passion* proved pivotal.

"The music was profoundly beautiful, but also, the story of the crucifixion deeply touched my heart," Mike remembers.

He attended the concert as an atheist but by the time he left his heart was whispering "I believe."

At the time, he was studying with one of Australia's most prominent composers.

"I asked him, 'Why did Bach create such beautiful, harmonious, and meaningful music? And why do we today create this very dissonant-sounding avant-garde music?'"

"He said, 'They had God in those days, but we don't have God anymore.' That was his answer! To me that was like a bit of a light going on."

Mike realized that one's worldview shaped their music.

"Someone with a worldview that has no hope – we came from nothing and we're going nowhere – will write despairing, hopeless music."

"Someone with a hopeful, positive worldview about a purposeful Creator will create purposeful and hopeful music."

"And that is what you see in the great Christian composers. There would always be triumph and hope at the end because that's reflective of their worldview."

Mike had in fact grown up in a Christian family but his faith was undermined by reading the likes of astronomer Carl Sagan and other sceptics.

"My parents were loving, sincere Christians, but they and my church lacked confidence in the early chapters of Genesis, thinking they were maybe some sort of allegory," Mike tells *Creation* magazine's Andrew Snowden.

"By my late teens, when I went to

study at music college, I was an atheist, or at best agnostic."

Sometime after the Bach episode, a high school friend shocked Mike by telling him he had become a Christian.

"He shared the Gospel with me, and very quickly, I took the step of turning to Jesus – a very big change for me."

A couple of days later his friend read Mike some passages from an early creation book.

"There was enough good science in there, and enough truth from the Word, that I completely accepted the Genesis creation account as being true," Mike said.

"I completely rejected evolution at that point."

Mike experienced "incredible joy" at that moment. He no longer thought of himself as a random assortment of molecules caused by a series of cosmic accidents.

Instead, he realized that he was a loved creation of a purposeful and living Creator:

"It was an incredible life-changer for me, and I said, 'I want to serve this God.'"

So, that's what he did. He spent 30 years overseas doing humanitarian missions work while performing.

"Music opened doors to travel to various countries that would normally be quite closed to the gospel."

Music disproves evolution in its own way, Mike shares, saying it is a uniquely human ability that doesn't really make sense within evolutionary theory:

"What would be the survival advantage of being able to play a harmonic and melodic instrument?" he asked.

"If you think about how musical ability supposedly evolved, or look up the literature on it, evolutionists are really clutching at straws."

"They try to explain why and how we would develop such fine acoustic appreciation, and the motor skills to be able to perform music."

"Researchers are uncovering how the design of our inner ear 'receiver' coupled with the brain's computational ability allows humans to distinguish the pitch and timing of

FINDING THE MEANING BEHIND THE MUSIC

notes in a way that greatly exceeds a theoretical mathematical limit.

"It is bordering on absurd to think that such advanced technology could come about from the selection of random but somehow advantageous mutations."

One of Mike's recent compositions, *Perpetua* – a classical choral work about the Christian martyr of that name – is about "standing up for faith in difficult times and living for heavenly values rather than worldly

success or values – and about supporting the persecuted church."

"There was a time in my Christian walk when I started to waver. Some Christian writers were trying to reinterpret Genesis to allow for 'millions of years.'"

As he looked for resources, he came across *creation.com* and says, "I was absolutely floored by the high quality, the good scriptural and good scientific arguments."

Mike said he found the writings of creationist Professor Stuart Burgess on engineering and design particularly helpful.

"What it's really about for me is the authority of Scripture. It's the

fact that when God says what He says, He means it and He is able to communicate that to us.

"God can create the universe in six days. We humans can wonder how that could be possible, or doubt that God could do it, but He is omnipotent." •

1. Related to the complex mathematical calculation called a Fourier transform; see Zyga, L., Human hearing beats the Fourier uncertainty principle, *phys.org*, 4 Feb 2013.

2. Stuart Burgess is Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Bristol University, UK, specializing in biomimetics, i.e. copying designs found in nature for human benefit. See *creation.com/stuart-burgess-biomimeticsandcreation.com/prof-stuart-burgess*.

“It was an incredible life-changer for me.”

Michael ('Mike') Dooley is a pianist, composer, song and hymn writer, producer, and music teacher, who studied at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and Canberra Institute of Technology. For three decades, he lived in Southeast Asia, India, and the Middle East, involved in both music and humanitarian mission work. Mike won the APRA/AGSC (Australia's top screen music award) for 'Best Music for Children's Television' for his score for the 2019 animated film *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He and his wife Chalsey live in Canberra, Australia.



Michael and Chalsey with grandsons Jamie and sons William, Callum and Anthony.

THERE is faith that God spoke and everything came into being as a result. There is also a faith that a big bang happened, and billions of years later, there are millions of different plants, animals and people. It takes faith to believe either of these scenarios.

— Jeff Rhoades

CHRISTIANS believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. Materialists believe

in the virgin birth of the cosmos. Choose your miracle.

—Glen Scrivener

"**THE** God who created, names, and numbers the stars in the heavens also numbers the hairs of my head. He pays attention to very big things and to very small ones. What matters to me matters to Him, and that changes my life."

— Elisabeth Elliot

GET ANSWERS FOR YOUR FAMILY

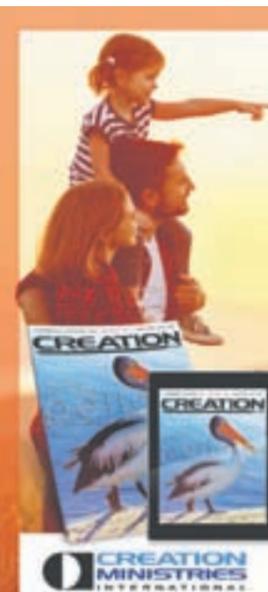
Young people struggle to find purpose in life, believing that 'science' has made God irrelevant.

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- Helps Christians share and defend their faith



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Youth Truth

Dragged down by my addiction

Isaiah Ramos was only three years old when his father was sent to prison for 15 years, forcing his mother to raise four children on her own in the Bronx, New York.

"We went from shelter to shelter," Isaiah recalls in a Delafé Testimonies video. "There was no stability."

At a young age Isaiah was exposed to masturbation and pornography.

He remembers going to church with his mother but at the same time "messing around with the young girls in the church and just living a life of lust and secret sin".

"Once I hit an age where I could tell my mom, 'I don't want to go to church this Sunday', she let me stay home ...

"I began looking up to all the wrong men because my dad wasn't in my life.

"I started just chasing money and fame, caring about my clothes, idolising what I put on my body, trying to seek purpose in different sports, living a life of fornication, sleeping around with different women."

After graduating high school, Isaiah started pursuing a boxing career, which led him to a new obsession: gambling.

"When I got involved with gambling, it affected me so much. It just made me depressed. It made me angry."

Isaiah also started smoking weed and before long, it became a daily habit – as did the gambling.

When his gambling began affecting his career, Isaiah knew he had to stop.

He resolved to quit gambling as his New Year's resolution.

He managed to kick the habit – but found he replaced it with smoking weed more and sleeping around.

One night Isaiah was driving with a friend and they were popping pills to get high.

"I got into an accident and the car was totaled," Isaiah recalls.

"I remember I got out of the car and just fell on the highway. I woke up in the hospital with IVs in my arm."

After that, Isaiah's lifestyle didn't change – he went right back to selling drugs, smoking weed, drinking and partying.

"But I started thinking differently. I started having thoughts like, 'Is God real?' 'If God is real [and I died], would I be in hell right now?'"

After a discussion with his grandmother about these thoughts, three words stood out to him: Relationship with God.

"I knew that I needed a relationship with God, I just didn't know how to do it."

One day Isaiah's aunt invited him to stay with her in North Carolina so he could get away. He agreed, but before he left, he popped pills and smoked weed continuously.

"When I got there I was so anxious," Isaiah remembers. "This was my first time in two or three years that I was about to go to sleep without smoking [weed]... that night I prayed.

"It was my first time in a long time that I prayed. I cried out to God, 'Lord let me sleep. Let me fall asleep without having to smoke, without having to have sex, without having to pop pills.' And He answered my prayer. I didn't just fall asleep, I slept like a baby."

In North Carolina, Isaiah attended church with his aunt. He recalls tears streaming from



Isaiah Ramos was set free from his addiction.

his face as he watched people worshiping God.

The pastor preached about all the questions Isaiah had about God and how to have a relationship with Him.

"There was a man there that was sharing his testimony about how the Lord delivered him from his life of sin and that was a message of hope for me.

"It brought me peace. It was the truth, the good news that God was offering me a relationship with Him – a new life ... that day I made the decision, I said, 'God, I'm gonna give You my life.'"

When the pastor invited anyone who wanted to get baptized (submerged in water as an outward display of dedication to God) to come forward, Isaiah walked to the front of the church.

"I laid my life down and I knew it was a very major decision.

"I was ready. I wanted a new life. I wanted to change ... in that moment I knew there was hope. I knew that God was gonna set me free."

After that Isaiah began praying and reading the Bible every day.

"God began cleaning out my heart little by little, stripping away sins. He set me free from my pornography addiction ...

"He just began working in my heart; like I had no desire for it. I remember the same thing [happened] with weed. I wouldn't smoke because God was that peace that I needed."

Isaiah admits it wasn't a perfect journey and some sins were easier to give up than others.

"I said, 'God I am gonna stop doing everything else but I'm not gonna stop having sex.'"

But he became so convicted that sex outside of marriage was wrong, he prayed to God to help him to change.

"I didn't know how to do it, but I told God I was willing. God began working in my life and I began walking in purity."

Isaiah now shares his story in the hope it will help other people who are struggling.

"Jesus is the only way," he attests.

"He's the only way to true peace. He's the only way to true love.

"He's the only way to find your purpose. He is the only way to heaven." •

Miss Germany's focus of faith



Kira Geiss, reigning Miss Germany, sits on a pew in the Collegiate Church.

Photo: Marijan Murat/dpa (Photo by Marijan Murat/picture alliance via Getty Images)

On March 5, 20-year-old Kira Geiss was named the new Miss Germany, in a pageant that has traded in its sexist focus on swimsuits and modelling careers, for a much more empowering emphasis on leadership, responsibility and community engagement.

Kira, who won 25,000 euros towards a project of her choice, is also atypical, in that she is an outspoken Christian who describes Jesus as the centre of her life and wants to use her platform to "serve God and my neighbors".

The Evangelical Missionary School student's response to her win on Instagram was: "Thank you Jesus for many new doors and such great people by my side."

Kira is passionate about reaching her fellow Gen Zers with the gospel [good news that Jesus saves us from our sins] because it has made such a difference in her own life.

She grew up in a loving home, in Ravensburg, Swabia, with no interest in Christianity or much exposure to it, except through an annual Christmas shoebox collection, through Samaritan's Purse; and the occasional visit to church.

However, when she was a young teenager, Kira got into some bad company and began experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

Things went downhill for her.

"Until I was 16, I was in groups of friends that were difficult," she explained to German website Jesus.de. In an environment that glorified alcohol and drugs, she lived in relationships "that also left scars in the heart".

After graduating from school, she decided to break with her former circle of friends. Then two girls invited Kira to a Christian youth group, which she initially went to just for the fun and friendship, but then found a mentor and embraced the Christian faith.

"When I was at the bottom, youth group built me up. Today I see it as a treasure to know what it is like not to be a Christian, to be able to interact with those who do not have a faith," she told Evangelical Focus Europe.

"For a very long time I didn't want to have anything to do with the whole Christian faith. I even found it rather strange. And I think a lot of people feel that way, just like I did back then.

"This image of the church: cold, outdated, dreary, stuffy, serious and boring is deeply rooted in us. And I never thought that my mindset would change so much. But when I started to get involved with the faith and the church, I was surprised by the opposite," Kira shared on Instagram.

"Church is multicultural and colorful, I can dress wildly, dance and be crazy!"

She also attended evangelical youth camps with friends, where she learned to appreciate nature, face-to-face socialising and warm friendships. In her adopted home of Magdeburg, Kira then helped found a youth church, called Eastside, which works to ensure that young people are supported spiritually, socially and creatively.

Today, for her, "Only Jesus is the centre of my life", as she declared on Instagram, and belief in God is "a great treasure, my source from which I draw energy when I'm feeling bad."

"I would like to be a voice for the church. I love her more than anything and she is my home. I want to say to young people, 'It's cool to be a Christian. Church can also be fancy.'"

During her reign the new Miss Germany wants to focus on youth work and the healthy use of social media. "I actually want to work towards young people spending less time in digital media. It's dangerous if we spend more time with friends in the digital world than in the real world. Our emotional nervous system just dies down over time," she believes. She also wants to represent women and young people in policy making.

On the Miss Germany website, the aspiring deaconess describes herself as a person for whom it is "incredibly important" to "do good things for my fellow human beings and to integrate positivity and forbearance into my everyday life".

Instead of a beauty pageant crown, she received the "Female Leader Award" and access to resources and contacts to make her dream of a Germany-wide platform for her youth work a reality.

The Bible verse 1 Timothy 4 verse 12 could become Kira's motto: "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." •

“ I never thought that my mindset would change so much. ”

“ In that moment I knew there was hope. ”

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

Youth Truth

YOUTUBER'S FAITH PUT TO THE TEST

T Tyler Toney is a member of mega-popular stunt group Dude Perfect, which formed in 2009 at Texas A&M University. Tyler, Cody Jones, Garrett Hilbert, and twins Coby and Cory Cotton, all played basketball at the rec, lived together and were always competing and making up games together.

Their first YouTube video of basketball trick shots exploded in popularity almost immediately, leading to television slots, apps, books, hundreds of videos and several tours.

In 2011, Tyler married long-time friend Bethany. Both young people had made commitments to Christ as children but their faith was about to be sorely tested.

The popularity of Dude Perfect led Tyler to quit his job to turn the sport and comedy show into a full-time gig, something Bethany was initially nervous about.

"[Tyler's] success really took off at a time when I felt like God was calling us to start a family," she explains.

Sadly, the couple struggled to conceive and Bethany suffered two miscarriages.

"I was so angry at God during that season of our life," Bethany says. "Because I just felt like God was ignoring me and that He wasn't hearing my requests for things."

She said she felt broken, and Tyler admitted that he wasn't prioritising her at this time. "Christ wasn't first in our marriage, Dude Perfect was," Bethany admits.

When she finally did fall pregnant she wasn't thankful and grateful but felt like God owed her. "I was so bitter and so resentful," she admits. "It was like a toxin coming into my system and it slowly overtook [me] over time." In 2017, the couple welcomed a son named Barrett. Two years later, they had another son, Colton, and in 2020, they had son Rhett. Having three kids under five and basically



Tyler Toney (centre) with the rest of Dude Perfect at #YTMeetup at Skylight at Moynihan Station on April 29, 2015 in New York City. (Photo by Stephen Lovekin/FilmMagic for YouTube via Getty Images)

parenting alone because her husband was away so much enjoying "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunities, eventually became too much for Bethany.

"When Tyler was home he was the best dad ever but I needed him to be here more," she clarifies. "This was not what I signed up for. Our marriage was in a shambles."

Then Covid hit and the pair separated for a while.

Tyler admits that he had always had an issue with lust and had been struggling with pornography for a long time. When he returned to Bethany, however, he had a lot of solutions to fix their marriage and the first was that he admitted he needed to have a real relationship with Jesus Christ. To that end, a good friend came alongside him and they started a Bible study with other guys that has met every week ever since. They encourage each other to follow hard after Jesus and to hold each other accountable.

"It has been irreplaceable in my [spiritual] walk to have

those 11 guys to be vulnerable with, be humble and share wins and losses and all of those things together," Tyler says.

He also talks about the importance of "getting in the Word of God [reading the Bible] and showing up at church. "One of my mentors said that

most young men can handle anything except prolonged, sustained success, and I fell victim to that. I got really dependent on myself and my ability

to control a situation," he admits. Bethany goes on: "We stayed together. We did the hard work; had the hard conversations and peeled back the layers of sin." And the changes were significant. "Our marriage. Our attitudes and who we are in Christ is so vastly different from who we were even two years ago.

"Tyler now puts Christ at the centre of everything.

He's like a whole new person. Every decision he makes is prayerful," Bethany shared on an "I am Second" video in early 2023. "And my attitude toward what he's doing has changed too. I am happy to hold down the fort at home while he goes to share Christ with kids, and be a role model for them. We are now each other's team mates and Dude Perfect is no longer the enemy."

Because things changed for Dude Perfect too. Tyler felt God say, "I need you to openly share the gospel on your tours."

So he obeyed, even though it was scary for the guys as a brand, and intimidating for him personally to publically declare that God is now first in his life.

"I remember the first show. It was so outside my comfort zone. But the Holy Spirit just took over. And afterwards I wept with the feeling of 'this is what I'm supposed to be doing; this is the reason for the platform, talents and abilities God has given us.'" •

Tyler's message on tour is something like this:

"This culture says you need money and fame and incredible experiences to make you happy but as five guys who have ticked all those boxes beyond our wildest dreams we can confidently tell you that nothing compares to the joy and hope of knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

"The beauty of Christianity and the beauty of what we believe is that you are not valued by how much money you have, you're not defined by your experiences, or the things that you've accomplished, and most importantly you are not defined by your mistakes and your flaws. We might be called Dude Perfect but I am a very flawed and selfish and prideful individual and the only thing perfect about us is the Lord Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Becoming a dad is the closest I have got to experience what God's love for us is like. When my wife fell pregnant with our son, I had all these hopes and dreams for him – that he would be six foot tall, and like hunting and fishing like me, enjoy sports etc. – but when he was born the only thing that mattered was the immense love I had for that little boy, not because of what he would be or what he will do, but just because he is mine. That is how God loves you. You can't earn that love, you can't outrun it, and all you have to do is accept it."

Why is life so hard?

HOW do we explain what we see in this world? Terrorist attacks, sex slavery, racism, world hunger?

What about closer to home? Our parents get divorced. The girl down the street gets abducted. A relative gets cancer. We're likely to think, "Something isn't right here. Something is really, really wrong. This isn't how life's supposed to be!"

So, **WHY** do bad things happen?

There is an answer to the **WHY** question, found in the Bible. But it's not an answer that most people like to hear: the world is the way it is because it's the world that we, in a sense, have asked for. What or who could make this world different than the way it is? What or who could guarantee that life is pain-free, for everyone, all the time?

God could. God could accomplish that. But He doesn't. At least not right now. And we're angry with Him as a result. We say, "God can't be all-powerful and all-loving. If he were, this world wouldn't be the way it is!" We say this hoping that putting a guilt trip on Him will make Him change the way He's doing things. But he doesn't seem to budge. **WHY** doesn't he?

God doesn't change things right now because He's giving us what we asked for: a world where we get to treat Him as though he is absent and unnecessary.

Remember the story of Adam and Eve? They ate the "forbidden fruit." That fruit was the idea that they could ignore what God said or gave them, and strike out on life apart from God. For Adam and Eve sort of hoped that they could become like God, without God. They believed there was something more valuable in existence than God Himself, something more valuable than having a personal relationship with God. And this world system – with all of its faults – came as a result of the choice they made.

Their story is the story of all of us, isn't it? Who hasn't said – if not audibly at least in their hearts – "God, I think I can do this without you. I'll just go this one alone. But thanks for the offer." We've all tried to make life work without God.

Why do we do that? Probably because we've all bought the notion that there's something more valuable, more important, than God. For different people it's different things, but the mindset is the same: God isn't what's most important in life. In fact, I'd just as soon do it without Him altogether.

What is God's response to that? He allows it. Many people experience the painful results of others' or their own choices that run contrary to God's ways...murder, sexual abuse, greed, lying/fraud, slander, adultery, kidnapping, etc.

All of these can be explained by people who have refused to give God access and influence over their lives. They are going about their lives as they see fit, and they and others suffer.

What's God view on all of this?

He's not smug. He's compassionate, hoping we will turn to Him so that He can bring real life to us.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28). But not all are willing to go to Him.

But what about when life is unfair, when bad things happen to us? What about those horrible circumstances that hit us in life, caused by someone other than ourselves? When we are feeling victimised, it's useful to realize that God Himself, in the form of Jesus, endured horrendous treatment from others. God more than understands what you are going through.

There is nothing in life that could be more painful than what Jesus endured on our behalf, when He was deserted by his friends, ridiculed by those who would not believe in Him, beaten and tortured before His crucifixion, then nailed to a cross, in a shameful public display and then dying of slow suffocation. This was no surprise to Jesus. He was aware of what was coming, foreknowing all the details, all the pain, all the humiliation.

There is no question that there is pain and intense suffering in this world. Some of it is explained by selfish, hateful actions on the part of others. Some of it defies an explanation in this life. But God offers us Himself. God gives us the knowledge that He has endured also, and is aware of our pain and needs. Jesus said to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27).

There is ample reason to be afraid, troubled, but God can give us His peace, which is greater than the problem before us. And if we will trust Him with our lives, relying on Him, though we encounter difficulties, He will hold us securely. •

This article was first published on EveryStudent.com and is used with kind permission

nudge WITH KARL FAASE

Growing in the presence of God

HAVE you ever considered how your view of God impacts your ability to grow in your relationship with God? There are those who see God as an angry and aloof divine being, judgmental and angry. This has been replaced in some quarters by a God that gives us all we want and cares for our every need without any moral parameters. Bishop Geoffrey Robinson has written, "We cannot grow under an angry god and we will not grow under a god of soft, indulgent love." Both these views of God are extreme and unhelpful. God loves us and reaches out to us, but God is holy and concerned with how we live. Love does not mean He has no concerns with our behaviour and attitudes. •

"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." – C.S. Lewis

BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

What makes a good friend?

BY ROB FURLONG

KING Solomon wisely stated in the Bible that “a person of too many friends comes to ruin.” I take him to mean that it’s possible to have many people in our lives we consider friends, but, they are only acquaintances and, in some cases, bad for us.

He also warned of the pitfalls of placing too much faith in some so-called friends: “Putting confidence in an unreliable person in times of trouble is like chewing with a broken tooth or walking on a lame foot.”

Ouch! In other words, there are friends, and there are real friends.

What makes a good friend?

A good friend provides you with connection.

Lonely people feel disconnected from other people – they have “friends”, but they don’t feel any meaningful sense of connection with them. A good friend is an antidote to that. Solomon puts it this way: “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

Good friends share freely with each other, keep each other accountable and provide each other with honest feedback. A good friend of mine said to me recently, “I don’t want you to validate me Rob, I want you to be truthful with me.” And I was, as he has been with me over the years.

Friendship like this keeps both people “sharp” by providing different perspectives, fresh ways of looking

at things and a deep sense of connectedness that endures a lifetime.

A good friend provides you with comradeship.

Learn from the wisdom of Solomon again: “A brother or sister is born for adversity.”

The kind of adversity Solomon is talking about is when the problem is so overwhelming it leaves you feeling constricted, of being in a tight space, resulting in anguish and inner turmoil.

It is a picture of a walled city that is under siege.

When you are going through a tough or anxious time, a good friend is the one who is there by your side, walking through it with you and giving you courage to keep moving forward. It doesn’t mean they have all the answers for your particular problem or need, but they are able to give you the strength to see things through.

And it works both ways. When your friend’s “city” is under siege, you are there for them.

Friends who walk with each other through their times of adversity develop a lasting comradeship – the



Stock photo

“No one is in a hurry. There’s no pressure to make something happen.

“People are not burdened by expectations of dress, correctness of opinion, or responsibilities for various programs. They just like being together. They really care about each other. No one is in a hurry to get somewhere else. They just... linger.

sense that they are in this together and irrespective of the outcome, they’ll see it through with you to the end.

A good friend provides you with community.

One of the devastating aspects of loneliness is the feeling of a “lack of belonging” but good friends create a community where people are free to be themselves and are genuinely celebrated. There is a sense of being part of a family or as Solomon described it, being with “friends who stick closer than brothers or sisters.”

Gordon MacDonald captured the essence of this type of community of friends when he wrote:

“It is a collection of people who think it’s all right just to linger without always having to measure things in terms of results.”

This is the kind of community Jesus established through His ministry and today we call it the church.

This was brought about by His death and resurrection for sin which when accepted by us restores our relationship with God, and in turn, enables us to enter into relationships with each other that provide deep connection, concerned support in tough times and safe places of acceptance. Who can you provide with connection, comradeship, or community today?

Lessons from a sick bed

BY JODY BENNETT

Continued from last month...

Here are final insights that came to me while enduring an extended period of illness.

8. Sometimes in all the waiting and pain of a long illness, one can have days of despair where it all becomes too much. That is when I had to remind myself that feelings are not reliable – they lie. Feelings are influenced by how much sleep I’ve had, my digestion, what others have done or said, what I’ve watched or Googled, by my pain or discomfort. Feelings are fickle and transitory, they cannot be relied on. I feel God is far away and has abandoned me. Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt 28:20) I feel like my prayers hit the ceiling. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. (1 Peter 3:12) The Bible reminds me that feelings change but the Word of God is a solid foundation.



9. One way to tackle bad days, I found, was to remember people worse off than myself. While I was sick, there was a terrible earthquake in Syria and Turkey, and I thought about those poor people trapped under the rubble. Here am I on my comfy couch, with my tea and my headphones, and my dog at my feet. Millions of people would trade places with me, sick as I am. And that would inevitably lead to thanksgiving. Thank you God for our home, for my dog, for the opportunity to rest, for this comfy pillow etc. etc. That would turn my thoughts from despair to gratitude. The Bible even commands us to do this: 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

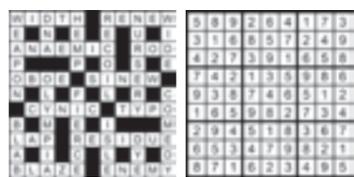
10. The second way to tackle bad days is to remember this too will pass. Things change, the tunnel ends, the pain eases, the sun comes out. It will not be like this forever. Bad situations improve. Most illnesses and wounds heal. And, as a Christian, even if the situation doesn’t improve and worst comes to worst and I die, there is hope even then because heaven awaits. God has promised that I will live eternally in perfection in His presence – a forever without any sorrow or crying or death or pain! “God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. (Revelations 21:3-4)

So, if you are a fellow sufferer, going through a dark time, may I encourage you: God can “work all things for good” as Romans 8:28 says, if you are of those “who love Him and are called according to His purpose” i.e. a Christian. To become one you need to love and trust Him enough to turn away from your sins, and give your circumstances and life into His hands.

“Suffering is part of the human condition,” as the late Billy Graham once said, “and it comes to us all. The key is how we react to it, either turning away from God in anger and bitterness or growing closer to Him in trust and confidence.”

May you find God in your dark times.

For the full article online see www.challenge.news/jody



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nudge WITH KARL FAASE

Competing in the Olympics

WHEN watching the Olympics, we usually only focus on the winners - those who set records, stand on the dais and receive the adulation of the crowd. We don’t often consider the 98% of competitors who don’t win anything.

Did you know that the last finisher in the marathon of the London Olympics was Tsepo Ramonene from Lesotho? He finished 48 minutes after the winner and just in front of the truck clearing the course. He finished because he ran for different values. Not the values of gold and glory, but the values of participation and completion. He finished what he set out to do, even if no one was watching.

It’s a good value for life: live for completion, and finish what you set out to do. Don’t just live for glory and recognition of the crowd or the community..●

Want to explore more?

Here are some **free**, helpful, online Christian 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/TV shows - Good. app	
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**

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ

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

OUR PROBLEM: **Separation from God**
“Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God’s standards are perfect” (Romans 3:23)

GOD’S REMEDY / SOLUTION: **Jesus died on the cross**
“God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8)

OUR RESPONSE: **Trust Jesus by receiving Him**
“To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12)

ADMIT

BELIEVE

COMMIT

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

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

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE]

* Please check and write clearly *

Name _____ Phone _____

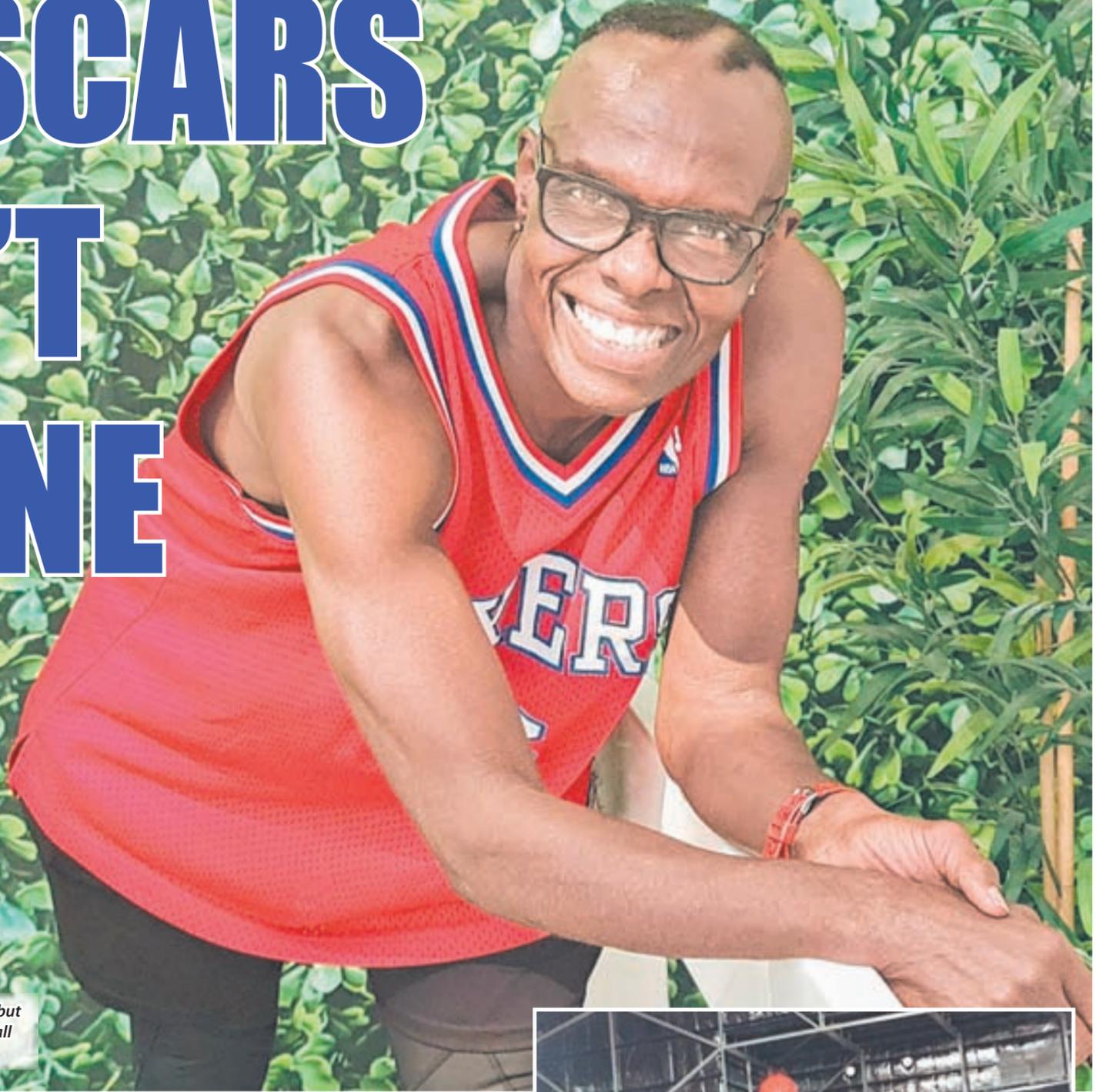
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Email address _____

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E-mail: usaoffice@challengenews.org

All overseas inquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

MY SCARS DON'T DEFINE ME



Wayne's competitive days are behind him but he stays in the game as a youth basketball coach and activity development officer.

It doesn't take much to remind 64-year-old American basketball player Wayne Simmons that he's cheated death more times than he's comfortable with. All he has to do is start walking or look in the mirror.

The limp when he walks reminds him of the bullet that missed his forehead by a whisker and hit him in the hip instead during his tour of duty as a Marine in Beirut in 1983 when he was 25.

The deep scar on his right leg brings back memories of the night he was at a party at the Sari Nightclub in Bali on October 12, 2002.

At 10.30 pm, in the middle of the celebrations, Wayne says he had "a strange feeling in my gut" and went back to his hotel.

Half an hour later the bombs that would kill 202 people ripped through the club.

He has that scar because the explosion was so powerful it shook his hotel and sent him catapulting into the bedpost in his room.

Then there was the time he was 14 and at a friend's house. While they were chatting on the front porch, a car slowed down and drove past several times.

When his friend, who was a gang member, ducked into the house and re-emerged with a baseball bat, Wayne knew it was time to go home.

Forty-five minutes later that friend was dead, shot by the gang in that car. While Wayne has no physical scars from this incident, it made an impression on him that will never be erased.

Wayne grew up in a ghetto neighborhood in New York, but managed to stay out of the gangs and drugs culture that many fell prey to.

A talented basketball player, he

was spotted by the Spanish basketball team FC Barcelona and played for them from 1980-1983.

He visited Perth, Western Australia on a holiday in 1987, fell in love with the place and has been there ever since.

Within weeks of arriving in WA, he contacted basketball team the Perth Wildcats and signed on with them from 1987-1989. Not bad for someone who was told he would never walk again after the Beirut shooting four years before.

Wayne's competitive days are behind him but his love for the game remains and he is now a youth basketball coach and activity development officer for a city council in Perth.

Life has been good for Wayne in WA, but he carried scars on the inside from his life in New York, scars that were invisible but just as real as his physical injuries.

His father was an alcoholic and his mother struggled with mental illness. She would often "hear voices". Neither parent was very present for Wayne and his siblings — it was their grandmother who took care of them.

"I remember my grandma would buy groceries for us and walk five kilometres carrying those bags to our place," he shares. "We lived in a ghetto, yet she was never robbed or troubled by anyone.

"I know God protected her. Without her, we would have eaten a lot more sugar sandwiches. Even today, every time I get tired in life, I think about what she did and I suck it up and keep going.

"I know she prayed for us. She would read the Bible to us and teach us about Jesus. She was an amazing Christian woman."

Wayne had grown up going to church, but, in his own words, "went off the rails later on".

"I had some things happen to me that made me question my faith," he admits. "There were a lot of family dramas and I asked myself if this whole church thing was really working for me.

"I was getting racist treatment at work too. So all in all, I wasn't in a good place."

Yet through his work as a youth basketball coach Wayne realized he needed to live the values he was teaching his students — that life would always throw tests at you but not to give up.

It was at these training sessions that one of the mothers invited him to her church. That Sunday, after an absence of 20 years, Wayne went to church.

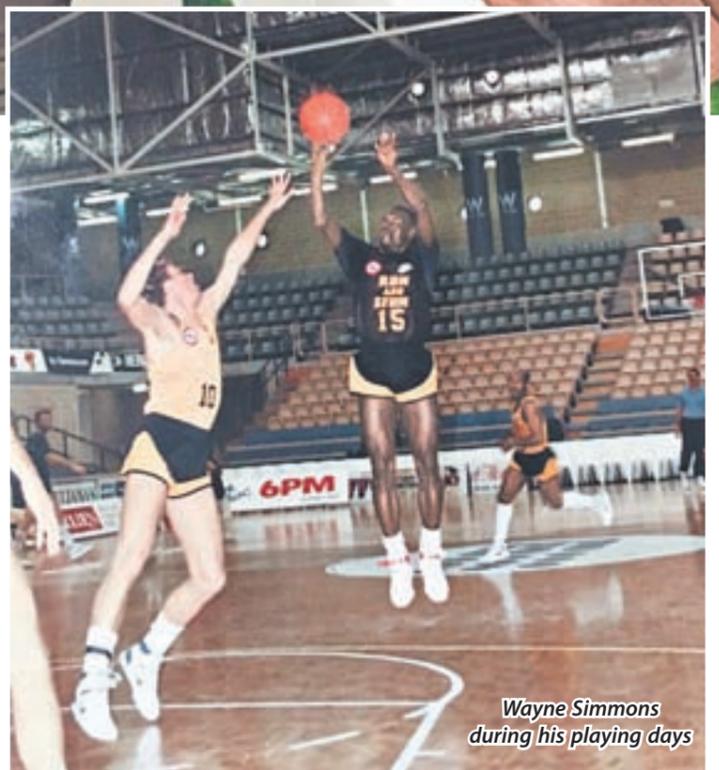
"I can't describe what happened when I got there," Wayne says.

"All I know is that God met me there and all the stuff the pastor said made sense and really touched me on the inside.

"I started to question how I was living and my attitude on certain things. The messages made me see the flip side of how I should have reacted to those situations.

"I saw that over the years I was wallowing in self-pity. I knew I had to clean up my life and get back to God. I had to be all in, not just ask God to put out one fire here and one fire there, so I re-committed my life to Him.

“ I started to question how I was living.”



Wayne Simmons during his playing days

"Now on Sundays I reserve time for church whereas in the past I'd be at basketball training."

Wayne says he has found it such a relief to be able to hand over his challenges and pressures to God.

"Being able to pray and give everything to God takes the pressure off myself. It's a great release to realize I don't have to do it everything myself and that I have His divine help to get through life."

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