

# I FORGAVE MY FATHER'S KILLER

When 18-year-old Shelby Houston received a message from her mother on December 3, 2021, asking where she was, she somehow knew something was wrong. She left her class at university, got in her car and called her.

"Your dad was in an accident today," her mother Shelley told her. Her father, Richard Houston, was a police officer in Mesquite, Texas.

Shelby asked her mom where he was and if he was okay and she replied, "He's not here anymore" and Shelby's world crumbled.

Richard had been responding to a disturbance outside a grocery store when he was shot and killed by Jamie Jaramillo.

"I remember the drop in my stomach when I heard the words and the instant pain that flooded every part of my body," Shelby recalls in an

Instagram post 24 days later.

She says she replayed December 3 countless times in her head and looked at every photo of her father and watched videos of him just to hear his voice.

She says despite her pain, she also experienced the grace and beauty of Jesus.

Shelby's parents raised her and her siblings in a Christian home and she attended church every week with her family.

She recalls in a YouTube video that, at the age of seven, her dad "walked me through salvation" [admitting you're a sinner, believing in the salvation offered through Jesus and praying for His forgiveness and continued help] and Shelby embarked on a relationship with Jesus.

It was that relationship that gave her strength after Richard passed away.

"Jesus has simply stood beside me, behind me, before me, and in me, all the days of my life," she shares in the Instagram post. "Even more so on December 3rd, at 2:11pm, when my Dad was shot and killed."

Shelby shares in a blog post on her website, shelbyhoustonbrown.com, that she knew from the beginning that she had a decision to make.

"I could choose to live a life of unforgiveness and hate, or I could choose to free myself of it – I didn't have to live that way. And so I did."

Shelby shared the eulogy at Richard's funeral and admitted, "part of me wishes I could despise the man who did this to my father. But I can't get any part of my heart to hate him. All that I can find is myself hoping and praying for this man to truly know Jesus. My prayer is that someday down the road, I'd get to spend some time with the man who shot my father. Not to scream at him. Not to yell at him. Not to scold him. Simply to tell him about Jesus."

She got that opportunity on September 15, 2022, when she spoke in front of the court at the end of Jamie Jaramillo's two-day trial, where he was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

"I forgive you, Jamie Jara-



Shelby Houston found strength through her faith after her father was shot and killed in 2021.

INSET: Shelby as a child with her father, Richard.



millo, for shooting and murdering my father," NBCDFW reports Shelby as saying.

"My prayer down the road is to spend time with you. Not to yell at you, not to scold you, simply to tell you about Jesus. I want to know what makes Jamie, Jamie. I want to know about your family, what you love, what you hate. I want to hear your life stories. I want to know the heart and soul behind the gun."

In the days following, Shelby took to Instagram to share her feelings.

"I had waited 290 days for this moment," she shares.

"With tears streaming down my face, I told the greatest love story of all. Maybe some would say it was the story of me and my Dad. Yet, Jamie already knew that one. It was the lifesaving one I told. I knew on December 3rd he was desperately looking for a way out.

## Questioning the truth

BY HARRIET COOMBE

**HAVE** you ever wondered why Christians believe the Bible is the truth?

Is there evidence outside of the Bible that Jesus really existed? Does history back up the claims the Bible makes?

Thankfully, there is plenty of evidence available to answer these questions:

### Accurate records

The Bible has the most surviving copies of any ancient document.

There are about 25,000 manuscripts of the Bible from all over the ancient world, some dating back to as early as the second century.

Although some people like to claim the Bible has been changed throughout the centuries, New Testament records are actually very accurate.

The physical evidence confirms the Bible we can read today is the same as what the authors wrote 2000 years ago.

### Historical evidence

Unlike other religious texts, the Bible includes historical claims that can and have been verified.

Archaeological finds have proven numerous times that the Bible corresponds to historical reality.

For example, many buried cities have been uncovered exactly where the Bible describes them being.

### Consistency is key

The 27 books of the New Testament were written independently of each other.

So the book of James was written without the author having previously read the Gospel of Mark, or vice versa. And yet the messages within the books are clear and consistent. There are occasionally small differences in manuscripts, called variants, but they don't change major Christian beliefs or claims.

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**CHANGING THE GOAL POSTS**

**AARON TREDWAY**

# Questioning the truth

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The New Testament books were written relatively close to when Jesus lived on the earth, and before they were written, the history was preserved by a lost art called oral tradition as the majority of people in the ancient world couldn't read.

### Prophecies fulfilled

The Bible is filled with hundreds of detailed prophecies which were written centuries before the events they accurately described.

For example, it says in the Old Testament that Jesus would:

- Be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), as a descendant of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), Isaac (Genesis 17:19), and Jacob (Genesis 28:14)
- Be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9) for 30 pieces of silver that were used to purchase the potter's field (Zechariah 11:13)
- Be mocked and ridiculed, pierced in his hands and feet, and that lots were cast for his clothing (Psalm 22:7, 16, 18).
- Die (Daniel 9:26) as a sacrifice for our sins and buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:8-10).
- Rise from the dead after a short time in the grave (Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 53:10) (from answersingenesis.org)

### Why would they lie?

Historical evidence shows that most of the New Testament authors were put to death for their claims that Jesus died and rose from the dead.

Why, if they had concocted a lie about Jesus, would they continue to lie in the face of extreme suffering and death?

### Historical documents

There are historic documents that refer to Jesus, His miracles, His disciples, His death, resurrection, and the rapidly growing group of followers who worshipped Him.

These writings have survived from early in the first century, the majority of which were handed down through Roman and Greek scribes and are free from any allegations of tampering.

First century non-Christian historians, Thallus and Phlegon of Tralles, wrote about the crucifixion of Jesus and that darkness fell over the land when He died, which they concluded was due to a solar eclipse. Another historian, Julius Africanus, wrote in AD 220 that this theory was "unreasonable". As Jesus was crucified during the Jewish Passover holiday, which is celebrated at the full moon in the Hebrew month of Nisan, it was impossible for there to have been a solar eclipse.

In the first century, a Syrian writer, Mara Bar Serapion, wrote a letter to his son in prison which referenced Jesus as a real person. The letter now resides at the British Museum and is often cited as evidence for the existence of Jesus. Flavius Josephus (AD 37-103) was a Jewish historian whose writing confirms the existence of Biblical characters such as John the Baptist, Jesus' brother James, the High Priest Annas who tried Jesus before His crucifixion, and of course, Jesus Himself. In one of his books, Josephus writes that Jesus was crucified and rose again three days later.

The Babylonian Talmud is a commentary on the Jewish scriptures and was most likely compiled between AD 70 and 200. It refers to Yeshu (Jesus) and the time, reason and mode of His execution. •

# CLOWN REALISES LIFE IS NO JOKE

**R**ichie Esposito wanted to be a clown from the age of about 10. He liked that clowns were unself-conscious and got to make fun of themselves and be a little crazy.

"They get to express themselves how they want," Richie tells a pastor on his YouTube channel.

Then Richie moved to Hollywood and began acquiring clown paraphernalia and went on America's Got Talent. He later used to juggle outside the barbershop where he worked, calling himself Richie the Barber, and eventually got a clown gig in a circus.

He embraced his clowning so thoroughly that he had a full-face clown tattoo done and cut and dyed his hair into red tufts; although his black eye shadow, other tattoos and face piercings are maybe more aimed at an adult audience than children! He did get involved in some very adult and strange things, he admits.

Richie says he always believed in God but "I was selfish and I wanted to live my way. I wanted to be famous and I wanted to be rich and I wanted to hang out with celebrities... And I did and I saw some crazy, crazy things."

But Richie wasn't happy or fulfilled.

"It was dark. I was feeling sick, I couldn't enjoy it."

He says he was involved in some really satanic stuff.

"I became a drug addict, a sex fiend and an alcoholic," he candidly admits.

"I was big, I was animal. I was a scumbag. I kept on having broken relationships and trauma. I had

no peace." He got sober and started working out about three years ago. But he hit rock bottom after his last relationship failed. He phoned his mom in tears and poured out his heart. After listening to all his complaints, his mom said, "Son, come home. God has a plan for you. There is a purpose for you."

The 38-year-old immediately felt "Yes" and right then surrendered to the God he knew had been waiting for him all these years. "I surrendered everything. I broke," he says.

A short time after that Richie was at the beach, having symbolically buried his old life in the form of a rock, when he felt the presence of God in the form of the Holy Spirit touch and fill him. Nothing has been the same since.

Richie noticed after this that his hard heart was much more tender towards people and he felt compassion for others who were lost like he used to be, and needed Jesus.

"I was in the darkness and now I'm in the light."

That was seven months ago and now he wants to become a pastor himself.

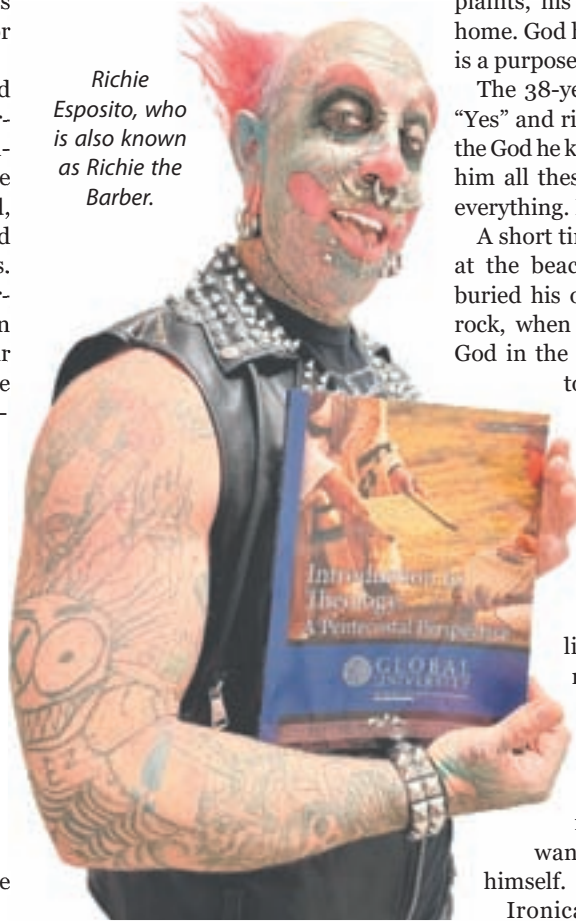
Ironically, Ritchie says now people act more afraid of him than they did before.

He has been called names and spat on, but he doesn't care and is very outspoken about his faith. He even went back to witness at a bar and gave his testimony (story of salvation).

Through this, the bar manager accepted Jesus Christ as her Savior and intends to be baptized (immersed in water as a sign of dying and rising again to new life).

When more conservative Christians condemn Richie for how he looks, he answers them with a Bible verse: "For man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

He says he has always loved people and wanted to make them smile as a clown, but now, by sharing Jesus with them, he gets to give them something so much more substantial and to love them in a real way. •



Richie Esposito, who is also known as Richie the Barber.

## From no direction to finding her way

**L**inet tells *Challenge* that her childhood was complicated, her family life was hard and she struggled with many personal issues.

"My family never had peace," she says. "My childhood was without direction and was full of struggles. I was a prisoner to jealousy, anger, unbelief and unforgiveness."

During primary school, Linet heard about God for the first time. "I attended a youth conference and I heard about Jesus Christ. As I listened to the Gospel [the good news about Jesus saving us] throughout the week of the conference, I got interested in knowing Christ and I decided to become a Christian."

Linet was led in a prayer of repentance [turning away from her old life] by a pastor.

"I gave my life to God," she says with a smile. "I had never known Christ as my provider but now I experience peace."

Linet speaks of the miraculous change in her life.

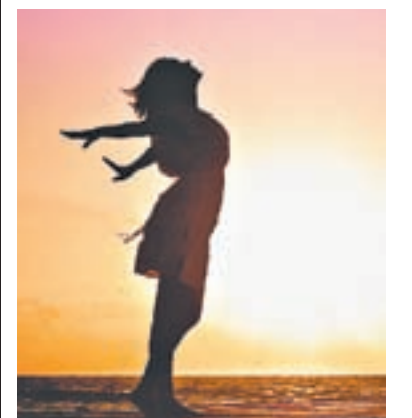
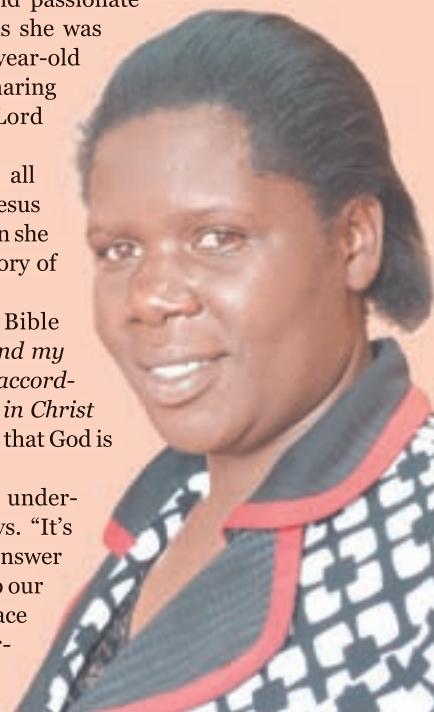
"I started forgiving people, something I never used to do before. My prayers have been answered and I have experienced blessings from God and from His people. I enjoy the Lord's kindness, joy, grace [undeserved love] and protection."

Her decision to follow Jesus may have happened well over 20 years ago but Linet is as dedicated and passionate about living for Him today as she was then. Now the married 32-year-old works as a prison officer, sharing the good news about her Lord whenever she can.

Linet has learned to bring all her worries and burdens to Jesus in prayer, including the concern she has that her family has a history of terminal genetic diseases.

One of Linet's favourite Bible verses is Philippians 4:19, "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus," because it reminds her that God is always with her.

"Sometimes, people don't understand why I believe," she says. "It's hard. But Jesus Christ is the answer to our prayers and is the key to our life. In Christ, there is a peace that exceeds human understanding. In Him, we are able to win all battles!" •

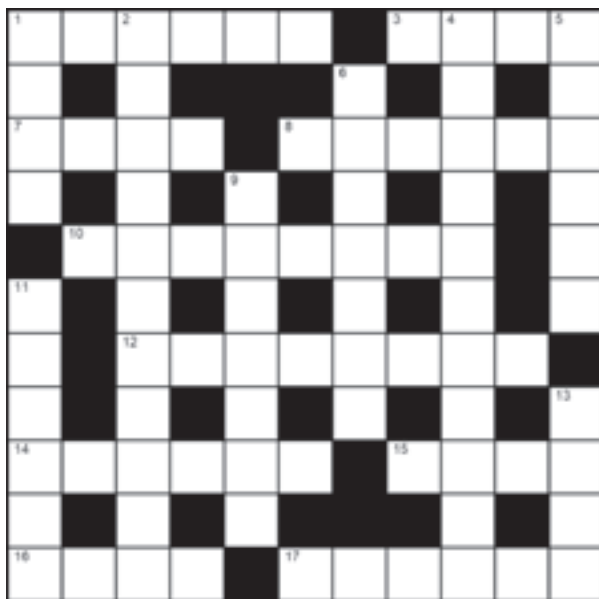


At my lowest:  
God is my hope.  
At my darkest:  
God is my light.  
At my weakest:  
God is my strength.  
At my saddest:  
God is my comforter.  
- Unknown

## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

### ACROSS

- Internet access devices
- Not many (1,3)
- Errand, job
- To make amends for
- Blood infection
- Toy with rail track (5,3)
- Solitary
- Mix, as ingredients
- Coral formation
- At fault



### DOWN

- Silent
- Stop, cease
- A primary principle
- Any tech thingy
- Staying power
- Moral allegory
- School financial officer
- Site of a fabled gift horse

### SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



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

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4		7		6			8
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# HAMMERING HOME THE TRUTH

He was one of the highest earning music stars of the 1990s, the first rapper ever to have an album go diamond.

He sold 50 million records. According to news sources, at his peak he was worth US\$70 million and was bringing in US\$30 million a year. He won three Grammys and Record of the Year and a string of other prestigious awards.

It's safe to say you couldn't go anywhere in the '90s without hearing *U Can't Touch This* or *2 Legit 2 Quit* or seeing his trademark parachute pants on someone. The song was right - there were very few who could touch MC Hammer.

His lifestyle was as lavish as you might expect - he owned 17 luxury cars, a private jet, two helicopters, 21 race horses and spent an estimated \$US35 million overhauling his California mansion - including, it was reported, a pool in the shape of the pants he immortalized.

The bubble of bounty lasted five years and then, not surprisingly, the money ran out. The entertainer filed for bankruptcy in 1996 with over \$13m in debt. Hammer time indeed.

In a YouTube video with Genesis Music, Hammer, whose real name is Stanley Burrell, talks about his experience with fame and fortune.

"Fame is a double-edged sword and very few people can really deal with fame," he says. "It is very costly; if you're not careful on how to tame fame then fame will tame you."

This led to his fall from favour in the music industry and the performer faded into obscurity. These events plus the death of his friend and collaborator, the rapper Tupac Shakur, triggered a return

to Christianity, the faith of his childhood and he became an ordained minister in the Memphis-based Church of God in Christ.

In 1997, he appeared on the Trinity Broadcasting Network. Referencing the Bible verse, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here" (2 Corinthians 5:17), he declared: "Tonight we are officially burying the old man. I want to walk sincerely in the newness of life with Christ."

Talking about his comeback to Christ, he told the LA Times: "Being a prodigal son took me away from the relationship I once knew. I just wanted to get back to the place I once had in my relationship with Jesus."

"Whether the bankruptcy played any role in my refocusing, that's great. Hallelujah I hope it did! But the most important part of what occurred to me was missing the love of God in the way that I had known it."

In another interview, he was quoted as saying: "I had an up-close and personal conversation with God and He spanked me. I deserved it."

Hammer actually committed his life to Christ in 1984. He attended Bible studies and church almost daily, joined street outreach teams and formed a Gospel band called the Holy Ghost Boys.

But this early zeal petered out as commercial success landed. Even though he promised God he would include one praise song on every album, he was sucked into what he



MC Hammer at The Richard Rogers Theater in New York City. (Photo by Bruce Glikas/Bruce Glikas).

calls "some serious junk".

The business became an idol. He told *Charisma* magazine "The 'business' drug takes all your time away from God, from the family."

"You create a utopia around you so you don't have to deal with the reality that you're not in the will of God. You wake up and realise you're a backslider."

He decided to turn back to the Lord but it wasn't easy. In addition to bankruptcy he suffered a serious knee injury and the trauma of his wife's cancer diagnosis.

However, he says God spoke to him in a dream and said: "You have suffered mentally and physically but if you keep your love for Me you can come out."

Hammer clung on to those words

and says God not only brought him through his crisis but also healed both him and his wife.

Describing how he went from millionaire rapper to spreading the gospel, he says on the YouTube video: "One day I woke up and I said 'this is not me - enough is enough'. I knew in my heart that I was no longer a part of the body of Christ."

He told his pastor Willie Harper: "I'm ready for the mission God's given me. I plan on being obedient."

Hammer has gone into evangelism in a big way, devoting time to prison and youth ministries and preaches often. He also featured prominently in 1040: Christianity in the New Asia, a documentary that examines the growth of Christianity in Asia.

In 1997, Hammer was invited to World Gospel '97 in Barbados and spoke at the local jail. According to the website believersportal.com, the organiser said "he preached until his shirt was soaked." Forty-two inmates were saved.

A self-described "Super Geek" he has reinvented himself as a tech investor and consultant.

But the most important thing to the redeemed rapper is his walk with God. "I want the world to know that all my blessings are coming through Jesus," he says. "God is now a daily presence in my life versus just a convenient one."

"I am honoured that Jesus has taken a wretch like me and said I got some work for you to do."

His famous moniker reflects his new purpose in life. Where MC used to mean Master of Ceremonies, he says it now means "Man of Christ." ●

“  
Very few people can really deal with fame.”

## I discovered the best-kept secret

After Erez Soref completed his military service, he decided to travel the world. Born and raised in Israel, he did as many Israelis had done before him, and started out first in Southeast Asia.

Sharing his story on the One for Israel YouTube channel, he said he was born to a Sephardic Jewish family and wanted to understand the beliefs of other people groups around the world. During his travels he read Hindu and Buddhist literature and had many experiences that opened his eyes to the spiritual world. When his travels found him in Europe, he met a group of young believers in Jesus.

"Well, I'm Jewish and we don't believe in Jesus," he told them.

"Why?" they responded. "Jesus is Jewish!"

Erez said he wasn't sure, but he knew Jews didn't believe in Jesus. As he spent more time with the Christians, his curiosity increased. He was intrigued by what they called their 'personal relationship with God.'

"I couldn't understand it," Erez remembers. "I mean I could see it. I could see how it worked out in their lives. They would pray for one another. They would talk to God like one talks to a friend... it's very foreign to a Jewish mindset."

He was also shocked that these Christians were more familiar with passages in the Hebrew Scriptures than he was!

"In school we would study certain chapters,



Erez Soref

and we would skip over a lot of the other passages but they referred me to passages that they called 'prophetic' or 'Messianic', that talk about the Messiah, and I was amazed!" Erez says. "I said, 'How come you guys know the Hebrew Scripture? I mean, this is ours!'"

The Christians explained that the Hebrew Scriptures were part of the Old Testament and together with the New Testament, they formed their Bible. Erez decided to read the Hebrew Scriptures for himself and was surprised to find the passages they talked about

that told when the Messiah would be born, what He would do and how they could recognise Him. So he decided to also read the New Testament.

"I was very surprised," Erez recalls. "First of all, it took place in Israel, in places I've been to many times. Growing up in Israel, I'd never heard anything about Jesus of Nazareth. I'd never met a Christian person. I'd never seen a New Testament."

Erez even visited family living on the shores of the Sea of Galilee several times a year. He had no idea Jesus and His disciples had also lived there.

"We refer to this phenomenon as Jesus being the best-kept secret among the Jewish people," Erez explains.

Erez felt drawn to Jesus and began to compare the prophecies about the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures with Jesus in the New Testament.

"To my amazement, it matched," he attests. "I

became convinced, first in my head, then in my heart, that Yeshua [Hebrew for Jesus] is indeed the promised Messiah of our people. Shortly after that I started noticing changes in myself. I had a great hunger to read the Word of God - the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament."

Erez returned to Israel to tell his family and friends about what he had discovered. When he told his family he believed in Jesus the Messiah, they concluded Erez had lost his mind.

"My dad's family arranged a meeting for me with the chief psychiatrist in our city and he actually formally declared me to be sane," Erez explains.

"I should have asked for that in writing. My mom's family arranged a meeting for me with the rabbi, and the rabbi promised my mom that he would prove to me that Yeshua is not the Messiah. The day before our meeting the rabbi called my mom, and he cancelled the meeting."

Erez was pleased to find other Jewish believers in Jesus and he attended their congregation. He wanted to study the Bible but was told that wasn't possible in Israel at that time. He instead travelled to America to complete his studies.

When he and his wife and children returned to Israel he knew he wanted to serve God.

"I remember very vividly how it felt coming to know Yeshua and having a deep desire to study the Scriptures and not knowing how to do it," Erez recalls.

"I felt very strongly that I need to go and provide this opportunity for Israeli believers both Jewish and Arab to study the Word of God, in Hebrew, right where it happened."

Erez is now the president of One for Israel, which started as a Bible college and has expanded to become a multi-faceted ministry which aims to reach Israelis with the Good News about Jesus. ●

The venom that affects everything

BY RICK LEWERS

SOME years back I was swimming with my family in the Cotter River outside Canberra, Australia. At the panicked voice of my wife, I turned to see that between me in the water and my son on the bank was an enormous brown snake.

I could not get to my son and my son could not get to me. It was as though time stood still.

I have thought about that incident a lot. It reminds me of the state of the world.

There is a snake-like creature that exists and he positions himself between God and people and between people and people.

We know him as the devil and he first shows up in the Bible as a serpent whose venom produces a necrosis that leaves nothing in life unaffected - a venom we call "sin" that completely upsets the central spiritual system.

John MacArthur Jr writes: "Sin is the degenerative power in the human stream that makes a person susceptible to disease, illness, death and hell. Sin is the culprit in every broken marriage, every disrupted home, every shattered friendship, every argument, every pain, every sorrow every anguish and every death."

God has written large upon his creation the truth that sin is a deadly poison that climaxes in eternal poverty.

Sin's venom works in no particular timeframe, sometimes killing instantly while at other times torturing people for the length of their lives leaving them sorrowfully unforgiven or making them bitterly unforgiving.

The unforgiven remains crushed by their sin while the unforgiving are hardened by their bitterness.

Of course, when bitten by a venomous snake, the immediate course of action is to access the anti-venom.

If you do not believe snake bite anti-venom exists then no one can help you. Similarly, if you do not believe in God, sin's anti-venom does not exist and there is no one who can help you.

Of course Jesus taught us that the anti-venom to sin's poison is only a prayer away: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us".

In the simplicity of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us that God the Father offers us forgiveness and inspires us to be forgiving.

If you need forgiveness, God can offer it. If you need to forgive someone else, God can help. In the simplicity of this great prayer are the deepest resources for life.

One can find the joy of sin's sorrows lifted and the chains of bitterness released. Isn't that something that everyone needs and worthy of praying for?

I love the fact that Jesus met his death with the words "Father forgive them". It means God harbours no grudge and His forgiveness ends the sorrow of my guilt. If you want to be forgiven and forgiving, Jesus is the place to start. ●

# Seeking answers to the afterlife

What is the meaning of life? Is there an afterlife? These were two questions that kept intruding in Paul Holliday's life. He considered himself an agnostic for the most part, not really caring whether God existed. But events and circumstances would happen and he would ask himself whether God could actually exist and what He would be like.

"I mainly wondered if there was an afterlife when I knew of someone who had passed away," Paul says. "It didn't make any sense why anyone

would come into this world, live to a certain age, then die without any sort of reunion. Often, I would think to myself, what about all those things that people didn't do, places they wanted to see but never got a chance to? What about the people who they never got a chance to meet?"

"It seemed to me that there had to be an after-life, a good one, where we would never have to say goodbye to a loved one or friend again."

Paul concluded that if God did exist and there was a heaven and hell, he would go to heaven.

"I was mostly a good person and I believed that all religions led to God," he says. Yet Paul knew that he was not always good, and he wondered whether this would jeopardise his entrance into a good afterlife.

"I had a big problem with lying," he explains.

"I used to lie to make myself look good, mostly in high school but it continued at work as well."

Then one Friday afternoon while he was working in the city, Paul had some of his questions answered.

"A friendly young man approached me and, as we talked, he invited me to go to church and discuss the Bible," he recalls. "I went along and asked a lot of questions such as, 'If I just live a good life will I go to Heaven? And, 'how can we know whether God exists?' In response they showed me the book of Romans in the Bible, especially the first three chapters. I also asked, 'If someone turns to God for forgiveness one day, then dies the very next day, do they still go to Heaven?'"

"The people from that group answered 'Yes'. It was at that point I realized that it's not what we have

done, but what God has done for us (Matthew 20:1-16 and Luke 23:40-43). I also asked whether following other religions led people to Heaven. They responded by showing me John 14:6, 'Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"' and Acts 4:12."

"I asked other questions and they answered them all from the Bible. I only stayed with this group for about a week because I found them very exclusive and critical of other churches. Instead, I attended one

of my mom's friend's church and enrolled in a course that explained Christianity. I soon realized that my own standard of living compared to God's was a long way apart.

"I knew that if I died I would end up in hell, eternally separated from God. So, on one Sunday afternoon in December 1996, I went into my room and confessed to God that I fell short of His perfect standards and that I needed His free gift of salvation that He offers to all of humanity through the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul no longer believes being good is enough to get anyone into Heaven, and sees this as the difference between Christianity and religion.

"Before I became a Christian if



Paul Holliday

anyone told me 'If you just live a good life and don't harm anyone, you will go to Heaven', I would have accepted that answer," he says.

"But I've realized this is religion and not true Christianity. Now, I get

very sad when I meet so many nice people that say that, and in reality they are facing eternal separation from God. There are no second chances after a person dies, as shown in Hebrews 9:27-28, which

says, 'Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.'

"When nice and good people get sick or die at quite a young age, I often hear people say, 'It always happens to the wrong people, and not to the bad people who stab innocent people.' In reality, all of us are just as bad as one another. Romans 3:23 says, 'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' And it says in James 2:10, 'For whoever keeps the whole law, yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.'

"The difference between Christianity and religion is that Christians believe Jesus Christ lived the perfect life, not just a good life, and that He died willingly on the cross, taking the punishment humans deserved and then He rose again.

"No other person in all of history has ever done that and no religion teaches Heaven is a free gift. According to God's Word, this must be a personal decision between us and God. Nobody else can do it for us, each and every one of us needs to respond in faith personally."

Paul is passionate about travelling and has served in his church for the past few years, where he enjoys meeting and greeting people. ●

## MY DESPERATION LEFT ME

Guilt and shame are the twin engines of many an unhappy life and Inaya\* had been on that hamster wheel for years.

"I was born in a Muslim family," she says on a YouTube video. "At a certain stage in my life, I decided to become a religious Muslim.

"I wanted to serve the god of Islam. I wanted to go to heaven and avoid going to hell so I married a very religious Muslim man to help me pursue my goal and purpose."

That did not go well. "My relationship with my husband was very toxic. He has very strong narcissistic traits and I suffered. There was physical abuse and I was tormented.

"It was just always a cycle of guilt, shame and blame and no matter how hard I worked I could not do enough."

She says she had the same experience with Islam. While she was careful to perform all the duties expected of her she experienced no breakthrough.

"I was reading and reciting and repeating but they made no sense for me whatsoever," she shares.

"I started to realise that this religion has a very thin relationship to the truth."

Unable to continue, she turned her back on Islam and went into "a phase of defiance."

"I was out to take my revenge from the years of deception I went through, to break every rule and the same for my marriage."

Inaya sought release but says "it's never an easy thing to break out from a narcissistic relationship."

She describes herself as completely lost and confused. "You are addicted to that pain, to that poison that you used to take. Also, we had kids and my kids were suffering. It was just chaos."

It was then that a friend suggested Inaya see an "energy healer" for "spiritual support."

The healer chanted mantras and rituals over her. "She did things like open my 'third eye'. I felt good because I was thirsty for any type of spirituality."



Stock photo

come into my life."

The next morning, Inaya woke up and while drinking her coffee watched some videos on YouTube – and nearly dropped her cup.

"Out of nowhere came a video of a man who talked about trusting God in the storm! If there was anyone on Earth going through a storm it was me!" she exclaims. "I cried throughout the video."

She contacted the man who posted the video, and to her amazement, he replied in an email and told her about Jesus Christ.

"He told me 'I cannot help you. There's only one person who can give you help and that is Jesus Christ, you need to believe in Him.'

"He pointed me to videos where I saw demons being cast out in Jesus' name."

Inaya soon committed her life to Jesus and joined some prayer groups.

One night they prayed for her to be filled with the Holy Spirit (the unseen person of God). She says she noticed the difference the very next morning.

"I went to smoke my cigarette as usual in the morning but it tasted awful. I wondered 'what's wrong with me? Am I sick? I crushed that pack of cigarettes and haven't smoked since."

It wasn't just the urge to smoke that left Inaya. She says her craving for attention from social media "fell off" her without her even trying. "It wasn't a decision that I made, it was the Holy Spirit."

Thirsting for more of Jesus, she was baptized a short time later and says that she felt "full of power and courage, renewed in my heart."

"My desperation left me, depression left me. After going through the New Age teachings, Hinduism and Buddhism and Islam, I know I have found the truth.

"Sometimes we are confused and sometimes we fail and sometimes we need encouragement. Here is my testimony of my weakness so that you can be encouraged," Inaya concludes. ●

\*Name has been changed

**"God specializes in hard situations. He is most at work, most active, most powerful, most strategic when the odds are stacked against people, whether that's lifting people out of pits, storms, dry valleys, deep waters, shipwreck, islands, deserts, wilderness, even graves. God showed up and redeemed. Hope is not God's side hustle. God is there for you, and the harder the fight of life gets, the harder He is fighting for us."**

– Benjamin Windle

**"I know I have found the truth."**

# “Fowl”-lowing the evidence

ADAPTED FROM AN ARTICLE BY GAVIN COX IN CREATION MAGAZINE (CREATION.COM)

Let's talk turkey. It's a topic David “Dubby” Rodda is very familiar with.

The Englishman, who describes himself as a “retired scientist, geneticist-cum-poultry breeder” specialized in genetics and animal breeding.

From 1952, he was personally involved in a turkey breeding project introducing specific color genes.

Turkey farmers used breeds with all-white feathers, because the pigment in dark feathers leaves unsightly stubs after slaughter.

But they were unable to easily “sex” the hatchlings (distinguish male and female) without involved procedures.

The breakthrough outcome? After many years of effort, their male and female hatchlings had different coloration at birth, so could be easily distinguished. But they still had all-white feathers as adults.

The 87-year-old uses two other words to describe himself – “creationist” and “missionary”.

This is because he has long been a Christian with a firm belief in biblical creation – that God created the world and all its living creatures.

Raised in a Christian household, Dubby had an early conversion experience when he was eight but it was only when he was 14 that he received assurance of salvation.

Inspired by the writings of Dr Paul White, a pioneering missionary in Tanzania who wrote a series of books called *Jungle Doctor*, Dubby was challenged to reach African people under Islamic influence.<sup>1</sup>

The challenge came from his missionary uncle, who said that few missionaries were going to these peoples.

He asked Dubby: “If God wanted you to go, would you be willing?”

Dubby did not exactly warm to this, but nevertheless recognized, “Since



David “Dubby” Rodda

Jesus is Lord of my life, if that is what He wants me to do, then I have no choice but to say ‘Yes.’”

He then decided to plan his educational goals with missions in mind.

Prayer was always integral to Rodda's business; his family owned Rodda's Creamery, a household name in Cornwall.

The family always sought to put God first and according to Dubby “we witnessed His remarkable guidance on many occasions.”

When Dubby started his doctoral studies in genetics and animal breeding, he was confident God had created everything, but was unsure about whether or not this was by using evolution.

He expected that his professors would present him with lots of experimental evidence

to justify the widespread confidence in evolutionary theory.

But, he says, in all the evolution classes and papers he read, he found absolutely none!

So he questioned his professors about evolution.

One professor loaned him a book about abiogenesis (or chemical evolution, the idea that the first life arose by itself from non-living chemicals).<sup>2</sup>

However, Dubby found it far too mathematically improbable to believe.

He boldly suggested, “Isn't it easier to believe in God?”

The professor's reply struck Dubby powerfully: “Well, yes, of course it is – but who wants to believe in God?”

Dubby says, “His choice to refuse to believe in God was plainly in spite of the overwhelming evidence.”

Around this time, Dubby was very impressed by a book by A.E. Wilder-Smith,<sup>3</sup> one of the pioneers of the modern creation science movement.

His book described life's complex chemistry, the inconceivable amounts of information encoded into the “simplest” organisms, and the impossibility of life's chance emergence.



Before 1971, both male and female poults of Dubby's white turkeys all looked like the one on the far right. After 15 years of intensive breeding efforts, farm workers can now distinguish at a glance the brown females from the black males. All turkeys will grow up to have only white feathers as adults.

Take the turkey project for example.

As Dubby puts it: “The project required years of planned effort to develop the pure breeds for only two existing genes and to breed out the many undesirable genes that inevitably came to light in the process. It was plain hard work, even though we knew what to do!

“Yet Darwinian evolutionists believe that ‘blind’ natural selection and random mutations produced all life on earth starting from a single cell!

“They claim that ‘somehow’ new genetic information, coding for and regulating new functions, ‘arose’.

“Then natural selection produced ever more complex organisms, through unguided processes, over billions of years.

“In reality, they have no idea how all this is supposed to have happened!

“Our practical experience demonstrates clearly that ‘evolution’ is really a fairy tale, and has nothing to do with real, practical science! So why believe it?”

Dubby's passion is for evangelism and to challenge the church to return to the authority of God's Word.

He recognizes that evolution with its millions of years represents an obstacle, blinding the eyes of unbelievers and Christians alike.

He says: “I am fully confident, on the basis of all the genetic evidence I have seen, that every living organism is descended from a Genesis kind, created originally perfect a relatively short time ago. This is exactly what the Bible teaches!”

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David “Dubby” Rodda graduated in agricultural science from Reading University in the UK, which also granted him a master's degree in poultry science. He earned a PhD in animal science and genetics from Guelph, Canada, specialising in statistical approaches to genetics and animal breeding. Later he had practical experience in guiding a successful turkey-breeding program on the family farm.

## Believe it or not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL



### How do ants find their way home?

**CONSIDER** the ant's weekly grocery run. It has to find a new source of food every day – how does it find its way back to its nest without getting lost?

Like Pacific salmon<sup>1</sup> and monarch butterflies<sup>2</sup>, who find their way back to their original nesting grounds to mate years after leaving them, the navigation abilities of ants amaze scientists.

Researchers from universities in the UK and Australia who have studied the ant's homing abilities reported their findings in a 2022 paper.<sup>3</sup>

The scientists studied a colony of desert ants travelling between their nest and a regular food source and discovered they use something called ‘path integration’, to compute the distance and direction from home. This programmed behaviour helps the insect to keep track of compass heading and distance travelled so it can compute a direct path home.<sup>4</sup>

Navigation systems expert Eric Cassell explains: They use “visual landmarks, vector memories of route segments, and path integration.” They also detect odors and use a combination of “sensor information sources for path integration, including a sun compass, biological clock, and two forms of odometers.”<sup>5</sup>

“Path integration affords the ants surprisingly accurate information about the nest position even after wide-ranging foraging runs,” he adds.

“This is a further indication of the advanced engineering of their navigation system. And keep in mind, this is all managed in a brain that is only about one-fourth the size of a honey-bee brain, and the skills are largely innate, not learned or taught.”<sup>6</sup>

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## Mutation accumulation leads to extinction

PETER'S CORNER WITH PETER MIKULA

**DID** you know that mutations accumulate in our human generations quite quickly? A mutation is a random accidental change in the DNA sequence in a gene (genome). Scientists have estimated that each child carries on average 60 to 100 more mutations than their parents.

Most mutations that we accumulate are “slightly deleterious” which means that they are slightly harmful.

For example they might interfere with our ability to produce a certain protein or enzyme.

Any really harmful mutations cause severe disease and death, but the slightly harmful ones build up through the generations.

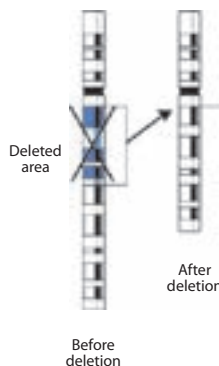
The problem is that as they build up, those mutations cause gradual decline in health, or decline in fitness.

That could eventually lead humans to become extinct, as individuals gradually lose the ability to live long, or to reproduce.

I read a paper by a secular geneticist Alexey Kondrashov (who believes in evolution) on this topic.

He argued that for vertebrates, which includes humans, decline in fitness occurs due to an excessive mutational load.

Assuming a perfect genome to start with, he calculated



a rate of 100 lethal (meaning harmful) mutations per genome, which led to his question in the title of his paper: “Why have we not died 100 times over?”

If humans have been on earth for the few thousand years indicated in the Bible, and started with perfect DNA, then there has not been enough time for decline in fitness to become lethal.

So we should still be here. But if, as evolutionists claim, humans have been on earth for over 1,000,000 years, we should surely have become extinct a long long time ago!

It should be easy to work out whether we are here or extinct, and thus whether the Bible account or the evolution account is true. Our real challenge is to accept the answer.

I hope these words help you, as they have me, in your journey to surely trust the Bible.

I gratefully acknowledge the below references for background information for this article.

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



### GET ANSWERS FOR YOUR FAMILY

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# Youth Truth

## “Harmless fun” led me down a dangerous path

It began with the horoscope pages in teen magazines. Tailah Scroggins was nine when she discovered them – and was instantly hooked.

“I didn’t know any better and it became really important to me,” says the 25-year-old singer and musician, who has a following in the hundreds of thousands on TikTok and Instagram.

Following her star sign and tracking her friends’ Zodiac calendar seemed like harmless fun, but actually opened the door to the occult.

Tailah became an astrologer and new age believer who used crystals and tarot cards to connect with the dark realms.

Her involvement with witchcraft came about, she says, because although her family were Christians, nobody ever explained to her why it was bad.

“I was just told not to get involved with that – but that made me even more curious because it became forbidden fruit.”

While she was in college Tailah pursued a life of pleasure – drinks, parties and men.

“I lived for the world, but no amount of friends, romantic relationships, parties, yoga, or meditation could fill the emptiness I felt. It was a dark two years and I struggled with depression and anxiety,” she confesses.

She fell into deep depression which might have led to something tragic, but says that when she hit her lowest point, “I cried out to Jesus and He met me in my tiny college apartment.

“I rededicated my life to Him then and there. He delivered me from depression and anxiety and filled me with peace and hope.

“The pain and healing process that I went through during that time has equipped me with the tools necessary to walk others out of darkness and into His light.”

Those tools are the videos Tailah posts on TikTok and Instagram which have drawn more than 30 million views.

She began creating the videos in 2021 and says that to her surprise “they went viral” to the extent that thousands threw out their crystals and tarot cards and became Christians.

“I have been creating faith-based content, speaking, and sharing my worship music since then.

“I’m so passionate about deliverance ministry. That’s



Tailah Scroggins now makes TikTok and Instagram videos about her how to walk out of darkness and into light. Photo: facebook.com/Tailahj

“  
I struggled with depression and anxiety.”

what I do online and in person,” she explains. The videos draw attention to the spiritual underpinnings of practices like yoga, which Tailah says is steeped in the demonic. “Don’t believe horoscopes are harmless fun. They are not. They were my introduction to the occult. Astrology attacks your identity and gets you to accept your Zodiac sign as who you are.”

And there’s nothing new about the new age. “It’s just repackaged witchcraft,” she asserts.

Our true identities, Tailah declares, are to be found only in Christ. “He will take our mess-timony and turn it into a testimony!

“Everyone has obstacles and challenges. I always try to embrace struggles.

“God used [the giant] Goliath to get [the lowly shepherd boy] David on the throne. Your giants aren’t meant to defeat you, they

are meant to promote you.

“My message to young people is to throw all that occult stuff away and let God free them. He is what they’re searching for.”

## I reached the top and it was empty

It wasn’t the struggle that made me surrender to God.

It wasn’t when I was going through college and was poor. It was reaching the top and realizing that it all was like Paul said in the Bible... it was like dung. Literally poop. It was worth nothing. It was empty and it did not fully fulfill.

It was then that I realized, “Lord, I’ve been trying to figure out my life in my own strength, leaning on my own understanding, not acknowledging You in all of my ways, not following Your leadership. And it’s never led me anywhere good.”

It was that moment of being in complete wealth that I realized I needed to surrender.

I just said, “God, I don’t care if I



Sula Lael

have to live in a cardboard box. I don’t care if I lose everything. I just want to be in Your will. Because I don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t

know how to figure any of this out.”

And I went into this God cave where I just obsessively consumed the Word of God. I read the whole Bible through. And I was actually having these beautiful encounters with Him as I read His Word.

As I read, He would show me what He meant. He would allow me to feel His love and His peace and His joy.

I truly experienced the reality of His Word! It was no longer something that I could never attain or live up to because of legalistic religious expectations.

His Word was ALIVE.

This is an excerpt from ThenGodMoved Podcast’s interview with Sula Lael in the episode entitled: Escaping the Sex Trade, Entering Hollywood, Choosing Jesus (Episode 32).

Ask me anything

Q & A

**Q: Does the Bible talk about reincarnation anywhere? How can we know this is our only life?**

**A:** Great question. The Bible never mentions reincarnation, and in fact states the contrary: “It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

If the Bible is correct, then why doesn’t God allow for reincarnation? Consider that the idea of reincarnation may be flawed at its core. Reincarnation is the theory that with enough lives, a person can somehow finally get it right and then be allowed into paradise/nirvana.

Many people think they are good enough – already – for heaven (they haven’t robbed banks or killed anyone).

With reincarnation, the idea is very similar. The only difference is that it suggests that you’ll be good enough... eventually.

Why is such a scheme flawed? Because it doesn’t take into account the sinfulness of man. The Bible says that all people have sinned and fall short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23), that all have turned from God and gone their own way (Isaiah 53:6), that there is not even one person who does good (Psalm 53:3), and that there is no one who doesn’t sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Therefore, what good would it do to come back to earth in a different body? The degree of change would not be enough to make a difference.

You live your first life as a sinner who has turned from God, then you come back as a different person who nonetheless is a sinner who turns from God.

This endless cycle would give no benefit to anyone.

Since we are sinners, we need forgiveness. Since we all turn away from God, we need to turn back to Him (repentance). This is the consistent message of the Bible.

God tells us to turn to Him for forgiveness and seek Him in order to know Him. If we do that, then heaven begins in this life and can merely carry on into the next life. For He Himself – not a different place to live – is what it’s really all about.

Even though the Bible refutes reincarnation, it does speak of a resurrection of all people...

“An hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29).

Here is more Scripture regarding that judgment: “And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it... And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened... and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds... And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:11-15).

Want to know how to have your name written in the book of life? Sincerely ask God now for His forgiveness. Jesus died for your sins so that you could be forgiven. But to receive God’s forgiveness means turning to Him in sincerity and with a commitment of your life. See *How do I become a Christian* on page 11.

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**Do you have questions about the Bible or Christianity? Send an email to harriet@challengenews.org and we will do our best to answer it for you.**

nudge WITH KARL FAASE

### Trashy magazines

**HAVE** you ever wondered why so many people read trashy magazines? These magazines focus most of their articles on celebrity gossip. Critics say that this focus on celebrity lifestyles is damaging in everything from body image to the general dumbing down of our community. Those who endorse these magazines believe that they give us something to talk about other than the weather and give us the opportunity to discuss social issues like divorce, drug use and parenthood. The danger is that these celebrities become our role models. We get our entertainment from watching their lives and our values from their behaviour. We can be fooled into thinking that a revolving door of relationships, endless partying and self-obsessed living is justified, even ideal. We need a role model who gives us positive values and encourages life-enhancing behaviour. For 2000 years Jesus has done this and still does. Why not take some time to read in the Bible how Jesus is a role model for you?

Contact Challenge!  
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Email info@challengenews.org

# Youth Truth

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

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

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

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

At 12, Johnny was an explosive mixture of pain, rejection, hurt and anger. But more than anything he was lonely for a family and emotional connection – so he joined the one place that promised him that – a notorious street gang.

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

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

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



**At my lowest: God is my hope.**

**At my darkest: God is my light.**

**At my weakest: God is my strength.**

**At my saddest: God is my comforter.**

**- Unknown**

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

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

**“I always had this emptiness, this void inside of me.”**

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

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

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

She told him it was because of church. Johnny rolled his eyes. "I said, 'Mom you're

crazy. You've been a Buddhist your whole life and now you're telling me about this Jesus. I don't believe in God. We were raised Buddhist."

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

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

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

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

The pastor replied, "Sin isn't just about lying or stealing. Sin is not believing in Jesus Christ."

"What he said captivated me," Johnny shares.

Sin, the pastor explained, was putting yourself and not Christ, in the driver's seat.

"When you do that you stand in the position of God," he added. "You're putting your thoughts above the Word of God."

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

The pastor told Johnny he had a choice – he could run his own life, with its



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

ever-changing feelings and thoughts, or he could trust in God's Word, which never changes and would never lead him the wrong way.

Then he told Johnny how much God loved him. "No matter what, God died for you," the pastor added.

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

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

One of the hardest things he

had to do was reconcile with his father. "But I knew God wanted me to do this."

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

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

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

Father and son reconciled and now share a relationship

that includes regular fishing trips and, of course, noodle soup. "It's amazing. And it was only possible because of God," Johnny says.

All this happened eight years ago. Today the one-time, big-time gangster has done a complete turnaround and is now a prison counsellor.

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

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

## Conquering depression and regret

When Janine Bester was 16 years old she started feeling extremely depressed.

"I'd carry every failure, every mistake, every insecurity on my own shoulders," she recalls.

Four years on, Janine now realizes that she was placing an impossible expectation on others to give her joy. Looking for fulfilment in the wrong places led to disappointment, bitterness, and jealousy towards those who seemed to have it all.

"I got exhausted from always trying to hide the depressed version of me," she explains, "and that led to me drinking too much. I'd have a few really good days, but I still had a reason to cry every night. I lost a lot of weight from feeling insecure, which caused me to have a lot of health problems, and the medication I had to depend on made me feel even more depressed. I constantly isolated myself, making up excuses not to go out with friends. I was in desperate for a standard of joy that the world couldn't offer me."

Janine grew up in a loving family, attended a great school and had supportive friends. Despite this, she wasn't happy.

"I was never content with who I was. I always wanted to be better and I developed a mindset of not being good enough and comparing myself unfavorably to others."

But everything changed for Janine in 2019 when a friend invited her to a big worship event at her church. Janine had been raised in a Christian family and attended church since she was a child but she didn't have a relationship with Jesus.

"I always knew there was a God," she says. "I just thought He lived in the church building and we visited Him on Sundays."

But during this worship event, she had an encoun-



Janine Bester

ter with God's Holy Spirit (His invisible presence).

"I physically felt God for the first time," Janine shares.

"[There was] an incredible moment where they asked everyone to stand if they wanted to have a life with God and I remember feeling scared to stand up, but I'm glad I did. Some people came to rub my forehead with oil. [Note: Anointing the sick with oil is taught in the Bible in James 5:14]

When I stepped out of the doors of the building I could literally feel everything that I carried on my shoulders (my insecurities, failures, and disappointments) being taken off ... I realized that God gave me that standard of joy that no one and nothing else

could give me." After giving her life to God, Janine noticed immediate changes.

"My dreams started coming true at age 18. My depression disappeared. I was physically healed and no one could explain how," she attests. "My reason to cry at night (even on good days) was replaced with a reason to smile and be grateful (even on my worst days). I realized that I could do things that I never could before because I learned that (Jesus') resurrection power runs in my veins too."

"Massive opportunities came my way when I let God plan my direction. I felt relieved because I had Someone I could give my heavy baggage to. My past regrets never appeared in my life again after I gave them to God. I saw God heal my family and friends."

"And now I experience more love from God daily than I would in a year from any human being."

Janine says she has learnt to hear her Lord's voice.

"I now have the ability to communicate with the One who created the entire universe ... The best thing about being a Christian is knowing that there's Someone that will love me no matter how many times I fail. It's awesome to see Him at work, seeing miracles every day."

However, she admits there has also been a cost to following Christ. "I have been in situations where I have had to choose to say no to certain things because of the values I live by, and that has led others to judge and mock me for that."

However, she assures others, "Christianity is worth it. The moment you realize God is on your side every step of the way, there's no reason to want to turn back. There really isn't a love as big as this."

Janine's favourite Bible verse is Romans 12:2, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." •

# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## Being present for real connection

BY ROB FURLONG

**MARTIN** Buber was a renowned Jewish philosopher who developed the “I – Thou” concept in relationships between people. His main idea was that when we take the time to see each other as persons not objects, the personal interactions between us are remarkably changed. We begin to listen and show genuine interest in each other, rather than using the relationship (or the person) for what we can gain from it.

His path to this idea was a painful one however. Just before the commencement of World War I he was visited by a young man he didn't know. Martin was kind to him and chatted with him in a friendly manner, but as he later told the story, he failed to perceive and draw out from him the real questions he was struggling with. Not long after the visit, Martin learned from a friend of the young man that he had tragically taken his own life.

The impact this had on Martin was profound, as one author notes:

“The guilt Buber felt was not that he had somehow failed to remove the young man's despair, but that he was not fully present to him. He was so preoccupied by his religious experience earlier that morning, that he failed to bring the full resources of his attention to their conversation. He did not turn to the young man with his whole being to actually feel with

him. Instead of genuinely listening, he brought leftovers, a courteous but partial engagement.”

Martin's story is not unique because we have all indulged in similar patterns of behaviour in our relationships, bringing only “leftovers, a courteous but partial engagement.” This is especially true in today's culture. People no longer look each other in the eye when they are talking – if they even are talking – but remained glued to their phones or tablets.

Opposite our home is a beautiful park and Karen and I frequently sit out the front at the end of the day, catching up with each other and watching people taking their dogs for a walk. We are often amazed – and amused – by those dog owners who are obviously just “doing their duty” by taking the dog for a walk.

The dog is fully engaged, straining on its leash to go faster, while the owner is obviously angry with this behaviour, head bent over the phone, texting or reading furiously and fighting a losing battle to keep the dog in check! (The same can be said for a lot of parents taking their kids for a walk, but giving all their attention to the phone.) We often comment on how sad this is and what wonderful opportunities for real connection are being missed.

How can we do better?

How can we be more present with each other?



Stock photo

I have thought a lot about this over the years and I am convinced that it can only happen we choose to see every person as a unique individual, created in the image of God. This is not “pie in the sky” advice, but a reality.

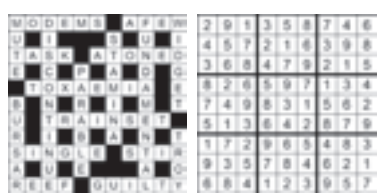
Being created in His image is taken so seriously by God that He says to strike out violently against another human being, whether by our actions, words, or neglect, is to strike out violently against Himself. James' warning of the danger of “cursing people who have been made

in the likeness of God” is a powerful example of the sacredness of being created in God's image.

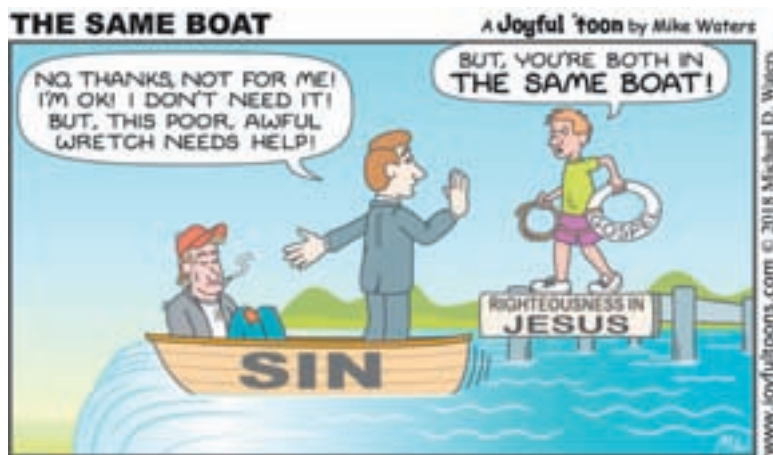
Martin Buber described the “I – Thou” relationship as one which recognises we are all created in the image of God and even though we are all different, we still respect, value, and love each other.

We no longer treat others as objects or as a “means to an end” but with “dignity and worth, affirming their uniqueness.” In other words, we truly see each other.

Who can you see today?



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You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. – ROMANS 2:1 NIV

## Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, online Christian resources:

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

## 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)

**ADMIT**

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

**BELIEVE**

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

**COMMIT**

Here is an example of how you can pray.

Dear Father in Heaven. I come to you now because I want to be saved. Please, forgive me of my sins. I believe that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die for me and that you have raised him from the dead. I now ask Jesus Christ to come into my life as my 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?

1. Tell someone - either a Christian that you know or email us at [usaoffice@challengenews.org](mailto: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 the prayer [ABOVE]

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

\* Please check and write clearly \*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Challenge. 2634 Drake Road / Cell: 513-804-8818  
Lebanon Ohio 45036 / E-mail: [usaoffice@challengenews.org](mailto:usaoffice@challengenews.org)

All overseas inquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

## Finding contentment

NICO BOUGAS

**CHARLES** Swindoll tells the story of a woman in West Palm Beach, Florida, who died alone at the age of 71. The coroner's report was tragic. “Cause of death: malnutrition.”

The dear old lady wasted away to 50 pounds. Investigators who found her said the place where she lived was a veritable pigpen, the biggest mess you can imagine. One seasoned inspector declared he'd never seen a residence in greater disarray.

The woman had begged food at her neighbors' back doors and gotten what clothes she had from the Salvation Army. From all outward appearances, she was a penniless recluse, a pitiful and forgotten widow. But amid the jumble of her unclean, dishevelled belongings, two keys were found which led the officials to safe deposit boxes at two different local banks. What they found was absolutely unbelievable.

The first contained hundreds of valuable certificates, bonds, and solid financial securities . . . not to mention a stack of cash amounting to nearly \$200,000. The second box had no certificates, only more currency – lots of it – \$600,000 to be exact. Adding the net worth of both boxes, they found that the woman had in her possession well over a million dollars! She was a millionaire who died a victim of starvation in a humble home. Admittedly this was an extreme case but many people imagine themselves to be poor and needy when they should be content with what they have got. Many do not really appreciate how good they have got things.

The multi-millionaire Rockefeller was asked how much it took to be satisfied, he replied, “Just a little more. . .!” It is a funny trait in mankind that the more we get the more we want. We hear stories of the rich and famous and we envy them as though they had all that life has to offer. But are they really satisfied with all they have got?

Enough is never enough. No matter how much some people have they will always want more. There are millions of examples to which we could point to prove that wealth, prosperity and material things do not satisfy, they only create a desire in us for more. Just take a look at the stars of television and movie fame. It is amazing how many of them are addicted to alcohol and/or drugs and anti-depressants. They have it all, yet there is emptiness deep down inside of them that they are still trying to fill. There is a hunger they cannot satisfy, and a thirst they cannot quench.

Paul's life was filled with many difficulties, which he could have complained about. He faced constant stress, confusion, persecution, and beatings that left deep scars and permanent injuries. But Paul had learned an important secret to life. He said, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:11-13).

His happiness was not based on situations, it was based on his relationship with Christ. He knew he had all he needed, for it was Christ that gave him the strength for life.





Following a 20-year professional career as a soccer player, coach, and executive, Aaron Tredway is now the vice president of Ambassadors Football International and has travelled to more than 140 countries and trained 5,000 soccer coaches in developing nations. Photos from facebook.com/aarontredwayauthor.

# CHANGING THE GOAL POSTS



**A**aron Tredway wanted to be a professional soccer player since he was five years old. He went on to have a 20-year professional career as a player, coach, and executive. But then his goal posts changed and his life looks very different to what he imagined as a child.

In an interview with *Risen Magazine*, Aaron says he had a normal childhood, growing up outside of San Francisco.

His father introduced him to soccer at the age of five and he was obsessed immediately.

By the age of 13, Aaron was travelling internationally with the youth national team.

“[Soccer] was the only thing I thought about; it was the only thing that I really applied myself to,” Aaron admits.

“So, growing up I didn’t do too

well in school and I think my mom thought I wasn’t very bright because my grades were never good.”

When Aaron started college he struggled to understand his purpose in life.

When he won a significant playing award, he felt validated.

“But when the buzz wore off, that feeling of satisfaction and contentment went away.”

When Aaron was 19 he began to question whether there was more to life than just soccer.

“There had to be something more,” he says.

“For the first time in my life I opened my mind and heart to examining the claims of Jesus. I grew up thinking I was a Christian.

“I went to church and I generally tried to be a good person, but in retrospect my life was all about me until I met Jesus my freshman year of college through reading a book called *Mere Christianity*, by C.S Lewis.

“That was the first time I started to understand who Jesus was, what He came to do, and what He wanted to be in my life.”

In an interview with CBN, Aaron says he prayed the sinner’s prayer [like the one on page 11] and dedicated his life to God.

“That radically changed everything that I believed about who I was, and everything that I aspired to be in the future.

“It didn’t take away my desire to

play soccer, but it definitely changed the objectives that I would one day have as a professional player.”

Aaron graduated with a degree in Wellness Management in 1998.

After a two-week playing tour in Africa with Athletes in Action, Aaron signed a contract to play for the Black Aces of the Zimbabwe Premier Soccer League.

“I wanted to play there because I felt I could have a big impact in a country that absolutely idolized the game of soccer,” Aaron explains.

“Those were two crazy and amazing years in Zimbabwe; I was then sold to a team called Hellenic in South Africa, in their top league.

“I played there for three seasons. I saw God do some amazing things, not because I was anything special or had life figured out.

“I really believe that God will use whatever we offer for His glory. Early on I remember saying to God, ‘If you can use soccer to glorify your name, then use me.’”

In 2006, Aaron was the founder and executive director of American professional soccer team, the Cleveland City Stars.

“The Lord granted us some success on the field, we actually won the Division II National Championship our second season, but really our objective was to use the team to train Christian players to glorify God through soccer; winning was just an added bonus.”

After a 20-year professional soccer career, Aaron moved back to the USA with his wife, Ginny.

They spent a long time attending a struggling church and Aaron served

as an elder. Despite the fact that when he first became a Christian he promised to serve God in any way – except as a church pastor – he began to feel that God was calling him in that direction.

Aaron now leads a growing church in Cleveland, Ohio.

He also speaks and consults on the subject of leadership and has presented to several Fortune 500 companies.

He also continues to mentor dozens of professional athletes around the world.

Aaron is also the vice president for Ambassadors Football International

and has travelled to more than 140 countries and trained 5,000 soccer coaches in developing nations.

He has written books including *To/Who: A Competition for Glory*; *Outrageous: Awake to the Unexpected Adventures of Everyday Faith*; and *Don’t Miss Your Life: The Secret To Significance*.

## Don’t miss your life

**EXCERPTS** from Aaron Tredway’s book *Don’t Miss Your Life*:

“I thought life was all about me – my wants, my needs, my desires, my pursuits. I thought life was all about *success*. That was my metric. Success was my goal. Success was the measuring stick of my life. It’s how I charted my progress.

“But what if success is the wrong target? What if I aim at success and I’m successful but I miss my life?...”

“I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to just get by. I don’t want to just make it through, keep my fingers crossed, grit my teeth, work super hard to hopefully someday, somehow, with some luck, limp across the finish line of life. That’s not actually life. At least, not the life Jesus describes. Jesus says, ‘*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*’ (John 10:10).”



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Aaron Tredway