

THIS NEWSPAPER IS NOT FOR RESALE

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# MY EASTER DISCOVERY

**A** makeshift stage, someone “plonking” away on an old piano, not a single laser beam or flashing light show, no sound equipment or great actors, just a group of youngsters with a message they hoped would touch hearts and transform lives.

Katy Spakman was 14 when she attended this amateur production put on by a local church – and it changed her life.

Up till that point she was a little girl lost. The product of a broken home, she says she was “on the road to hell” by the time she hit her early teens.

“I was from a non-Christian home and it was not a very pleasant home,” she tells the YouTube channel WhyJesus.

“My dad left when their marriage broke up. I was three or four years old and that left me with a void in my life.

“Before I was 15 I started to get involved with parties.

“I mixed with ‘the cool kids’ at school and was mucking around with my boyfriend. I was really not on a good track.”

Even so, Katy remembers she used to pray. She attended a Catholic school and so she knew about God and the Bible.

“I would whisper prayers to this Father who was far away,” she shares.

“I had a soft heart towards God but I didn’t know Him. Even though I talked to Him and asked Him things and needed Him in my life, I didn’t know Him.”



Katy Spakman made a surprising discovery at an Easter camp when she was 14 years old. Photo: Facebook/spakmank

Perhaps it was this early sensitivity to God that made 14-year-old Katy say yes when a classmate invited her to a youth camp for Easter, where the highlight would be a passion play. Passion plays depict the trial, suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

“I remember really enjoying the atmosphere at the camp,” Katy says.

“I could feel the difference in the people and the warmth towards me. I felt really loved.”

However, when the invitation was made for people to “give their lives to Jesus” Katy blanched.

“I was trying to be mature; I was

14 and trying to put on my best voice and I said, ‘I respect what your beliefs are but that sounds a bit too radical for me. That’s not really my style.’

“I didn’t even know what that meant to give my life to Jesus! It sounded so foreign. I was happy in my worldly life.”

Not wanting to be rude, Katy stayed on till the final night of the camp – the night of the drama.

The play, which was interactive, began with a re-enactment of

the Last Supper, where Jesus broke bread and handed it out to everyone.

As Katy handed the make-believe bread to the person next to her, “things got weird”.

“I had a supernatural experience where I could feel bread in my hand.

“And then [I had a vision that] the person who was playing Jesus became Jesus and suddenly the Holy Spirit opened my eyes and I wasn’t in that room anymore.

“I was actually in an encounter where I went to Calvary [the place Jesus was crucified].

I watched Him getting whipped, I watched the crown of thorns go on His head.

“By the time I got to the cross I was in love with Jesus.

“I’m like, ‘Whoa, He did this for me?’”

Katy dissolved into tears.

“At that point I realized I was a sinner and that I needed a Savior.

“And I said, ‘If You died for me, I will live for You.’”

Her initial reluctance disappeared, to be replaced by a life-long commitment.

“I knew I was signing up my whole life to Jesus to give every day to Him.

“Whoa, He did this for me?”

“I had that feeling that my life wasn’t my own anymore, like I had been bought with a price. I was giving my life back to the One who bought it.

“It was powerful and I’ve never been the same since.”

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## The day death died

BY ANDREW HALLOWAY

**DID** you know that your greatest enemy has been defeated?

Death has been conquered – and it all happened back on the first Easter Sunday.

We’ve all had some gloomy reminders recently that death is a reality, whether through the Covid pandemic or the wars and other tragic events around the world.

But death no longer has the victory over us, it is NOT the end!

That’s why Easter should be a party, not a funeral!

Invite everyone, get the music on, and get dancing on the grave of death – because we no longer have to fear it.

I say again, it is NOT the end.

Yes, Jesus died, but after a couple of days to show He was truly dead, He came back to life on the third day! And with Him He brought the invitations for all of us to a party in heaven that will never end.

When He rose from the dead, Jesus guaranteed that we too can defeat death.

How, you ask? He came back to tell us – and He’s the only one who has.

That’s what turned the world upside down

2,000 years ago as Christianity exploded onto the scene, as ordinary people encountered a living Jesus who could transform their lives.

Yes, we die physically, but – if we put our lives in Jesus’ nail-scarred hands – we can live through death and enjoy a whole new life, forever.

That’s why Jesus came. Not just to teach us how to live right, important though that is, but to give us eternal life.

That’s why we can call Good Friday “Good”. It was the awful day that Jesus was tortured and executed, but it was also the day death died.

Jesus’ death opens up new life to all who will believe, and His resurrection was the proof!

As Jesus said: “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish” (John 10:28).

Have you joined the party yet? •



**YOUTH TRUTH** Page 9

**Fun for Kids** Pages 5, 6, 7

**BACK PAGE**

**MMA FIGHTER**  
**BENEIL DARIUSH**

## DON'T SETTLE FOR ALMOST

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

**THE** young driver hit a tree. His car was a write-off. Adding to the dilemma, it was his mother’s car.

I couldn’t believe his words. He said, “I almost made it around that bend.”

Swimming champion Kyle Chalmers almost made it at the Tokyo Olympics. He came second place to Caeleb Dressel in the 100m freestyle – finishing just 0.06 seconds behind the American winner. But *almost* making it doesn’t make it!

If you miss by a millimeter you miss by a mile. To miss by a millisecond is to miss by a minute. Those who *almost* make it don’t!

In 1911 Australian geologist Sir Douglas Mawson led a three-man expedition in Antarctica. His two companions died and over 30 days and 100 miles, Mawson made his way back to base. He *almost* made it back in time but not quite!

When he arrived back at base, he saw the expedition’s



“Almost” isn’t quite the same as a hole in one! Stock photo.

ship leaving for Australia – leaving him another year in the freezing Antarctica.

**Almost got him**

An assassin’s attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler *almost* succeeded. He had carefully studied Hitler’s routine and set up a bomb in a wooden pillar near to where the dictator made regular speeches.

Hitler’s address, however, was shorter than usual and he left before the bomb went

off. The would-be assassin *almost* made it to freedom but was intercepted by a curious border guard. How different the world would be if the assassin succeeded!

**Almost certain**

I was intrigued by the word “almost” in the chapter headings of *The God Delusion* – a book written by atheist Richard Dawkins. The heading in chapter four said, *Why there almost certainly is no God.*

What an admission!

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# Letting go of bitter feelings



**B**usinesswoman Doria Chanda's parents died when she was 18. She had relatives but says none were able or willing to look after her and her siblings. And so Doria took on the role of single parent.

"I couldn't forgive them for that," she tells Challenge News. "I couldn't forgive them for not wanting to take care of us after my parents died. I struggled with resentment for years." She was also desperately lonely after losing both parents and longed for a special relationship "but I couldn't find any".

Five years after her parents died, when Doria was 23, she attended a church service and there she heard the gospel (the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for humanity's sins) for what seemed like the first time.

Doria's parents were Christians but they were not regular church-goers so her own background in the faith was patchy at best.

But everything changed at that service. The message that day was based on the Bible passage of Mark 10: 46-52, which recounts how Jesus healed the blind beggar named Bartimaeus.

Something in the message touched Doria deeply. "I became convicted that I needed God and I prayed to receive Him into my life."

In the 23 years since that day, Doria has gotten married and now has a fulfilling life. In addition to running a business, she also serves in her church's children's ministry as a teacher.

She is also involved with Child Evangelism Fellowship, a Bible-centered organisation whose purpose is to evangelise children and establish them in local churches.

Doria says she has learned to be a more committed Christian and to trust God in all situations.

"For those who like me have a passion to reach children for Christ, I hope they will partner with me and together we can win many souls to the Kingdom of God." •

# I WAS A NEO-NAZI

BY KEN PARKER

**I** joined the Ku Klux Klan in 2011, at age 31. I'd just left the Navy and was spending most of my time sitting at home with my wife. One evening, we found ourselves binge-watching the documentary series *Gangland*. While watching an episode on the Klan, my wife off-handedly suggested that I join.



Ken in Loyal White Knight garb (photo by Dennis Ho) and at his baptism in 2018 with Pastor Will.

"It's right up your alley," she said — and she was right. I was missing the camaraderie of the military, so I found the Klan's brand of brotherhood very, very appealing. On top of that, I wasn't at all fazed by the organization's ideology. Though I grew up in an integrated environment and attended diverse schools, I had some pretty racist inclinations. And I was fine with that. I considered myself a Christian, but my theology more than allowed for white supremacy. So, I did some research and sent out a few applications.

The Loyal White Knights were the first group to call me. They asked if I'd help recruit for an upcoming rally and, without hesitation, I said yes.

I was quickly indoctrinated. The organization twisted Scripture until the "faith" not only allowed for white supremacy, but demanded a defence of it. I was deceived and I also deceived others; as a recruiter, I lied regularly. In media interviews, I'd boast that we had 1500 regional members, when we only had four or so. It felt strange at first, but I got the hang of it and, for that, I was rewarded. Within three months, I'd been named Grand Dragon of Florida and Georgia. I was third in command.

As a leader, I became disillusioned — not by the Klan's mission, but by the members' rampant drug use. Almost everyone was on meth. So, in 2016, I left the Klan for the Nazis,

or the National Socialist Movement. Again, I quickly moved up the ranks, eventually gaining control of Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas. I helped organize the infamous 2017 Charlottesville rally, which really put me on the map. I was known.

Things started to shift a few months after Charlottesville.

It began with an interview for the Netflix special *White Right: Meeting the Enemy*.

I was shocked to find that I liked the filmmaker, Deeyah Khan. I remember thinking "She's a Muslim...how can she be so smart and cool?" I was genuinely confused.

Around the same time, a black pastor named Will struck up a conversation with me at our apartment's pool. It was obvious that he knew who I was, but he showed me nothing but kindness.

I told him that I'd asked many pastors for theological arguments against white supremacy, but none could answer my questions. Pastor Will simply replied that God had come to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to extend love and salvation to His creation.

I scoffed at the time, but his words stuck with me.

In the following weeks, I began questioning my Christian identity. I'd considered myself a Christian

my whole life, but it was becoming clear that I was far from one. I was a "Christian" because I'd grown up in the church and believed in God ... but, that was it. I wasn't following Christ. I was following Nazism.

I was also realizing that white supremacists' "biblical" justifications for racial hierarchy and hatred were missing from Scripture.

The more I read the Bible, the more I began to see that white supremacy was a religion of its own; it was separate from and contradictory to the Word of God.

**“ In that moment I was set free. ”**

As a major rally in Tennessee approached, I found myself at a crossroads. In confusion, I turned to Pastor Will. His response was simple: pray.

The night before the rally, I sat alone at my desk and prayed. Out of nowhere, I was slapped across the face by Someone unseen. This wasn't imagined; the slap left a mark on my face — I almost bruised! I then heard the voice of the Lord say, "You are not going."

In that moment, I was set free. I'd already internally acknowledged that white supremacy was a lie, but I'd still been bound to it; finally, that night, I found the freedom that Christ died to give me. In my resignation letter, I stated that I was leaving hate to follow Christ. Some members were supportive, but many called me a "race traitor". A few even threatened my life.

Soon after, Pastor Will invited me to his church. Of course, I was insanely nervous. I was sure that the members would judge me for my past, but when I arrived, everyone greeted me, hugged me, and shook my hand. It was awesome! On June 21st, 2018, Pastor Will baptized me off the coast of Jacksonville, Florida. I'm now the only white member of an all-black church — and I feel right at home.

The same God who opened the eyes of the Apostle Paul opened mine. When Paul met Jesus, he was on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus. I met Him on my way to persecute His people in Tennessee. The Holy Spirit knocked Paul down and blinded him; I was slapped. Two hateful people living thousands of years apart, same intelligent, redeeming God. That is a testament to our God's steadfastness.

There's no way for me to make amends with every single person I've harmed. This pains me. I can't make it right, but I can speak against white supremacy and share my story of divine redemption. I can share the truth of the Cross. It's not always easy to share, but since the moment Jesus saved me, my life has no longer belonged to me. I — and my story — exist for nothing other than His glory. •

As told to and edited by Adira Polite and originally published on Then God Moved

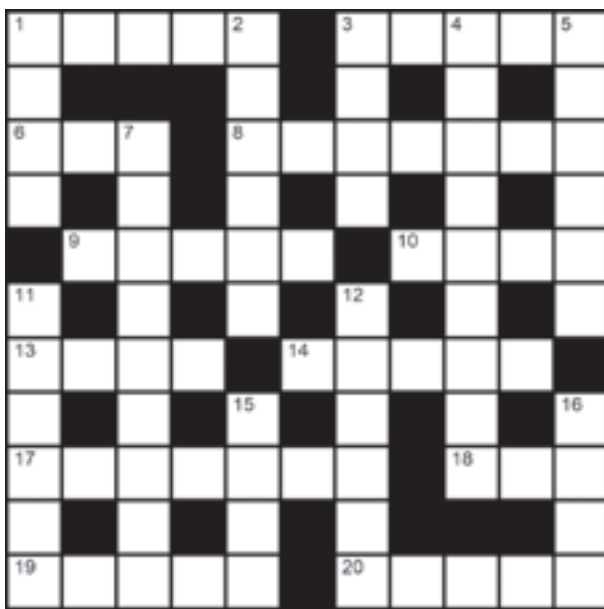
## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

**ACROSS**

- 1 Fly-fisher's target
- 3 Careless hurrying
- 6 Wrinkly faced dog
- 8 Woolly critters
- 9 Vegetable bulb
- 10 Wharf, pier
- 13 Chess piece or bird
- 14 Military trainee
- 17 Past middle age
- 18 Pool-testing digit!
- 19 Walk like you own the place
- 20 Darkest hours

**DOWN**

- 1 Oopsy on the keys
- 2 Receptacle for infusions
- 3 Cape of Good
- 4 Fleshy plant



- 5 School writings
- 7 Early explosive
- 11 Athens residents
- 12 Gorge, ravine
- 15 Horse's slow run
- 16 Thaw, dissolve

**SOLUTIONS PAGE 11**



"I know my instruments are sterilised every day, but I have no idea who does it!"

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		9	1	2		4	
					6		5
		8	2			9	
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	6				5	8	

## My Easter discovery

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"He was no longer a distant person; He was real and right in front of me. I still can't get over it.

"In 24 hours I went from, 'Yeah thanks but no thanks' to being totally in love with Jesus."

Today Katy and her husband Daniel, who live in Alice Springs, devote their lives to spreading the gospel (the good news that Jesus died for our sins).

They are volunteers with Iris Global, an international missionary organisation that provides humanitarian aid in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

Katy holds a special place in her heart for that Easter camp so many years ago.

"God uses anything and anyone and my encouragement to anyone with a dream to spread the gospel is that God will use your humble offering.

"He's not asking you to give what you don't have."

Quoting the miracle of the loaves and fish from Matthew 14: 13-21, she says: "Just give what you have and let Jesus make it into something miraculous and beautiful." •



Katy and her husband Daniel. Photo: Facebook/spakmank



# Body image was my obsession

An unhappy childhood. A string of broken relationships. Life-threatening bulimia. Former US Marine Justin Macaluso had every reason to hate his life.

"I had a really unstable childhood," says Justin in a video on his YouTube channel.

"I moved around a lot. Between kindergarten and 12th grade I went to 10 or 11 different schools so I couldn't put down roots. At home I felt like I was constantly walking on eggshells."

He says his environment got worse as he got older and he lived with the pain of rejection, sadness and fear.

"I tried to fill that emptiness with other things in life – I thought if I found the perfect girl the emptiness would go away," he sighs.

Instead what he got was break-up after break-up. He went to church a handful of times with some friends but said services left him feeling "weirded out".

"I wasn't raised in a church-going home. I grew up as an atheist and believed there was no God. The few times I did go to church I just got creeped out especially when the name of Jesus was mentioned.

"I just didn't see any evidence for God. At school we were taught evolution and the Big Bang theory so I got to the point that I just knew God didn't exist. I thought people who believed in God were stupid. If anybody mentioned the Bible or church my brain would just switch off."

After he finished school Justin joined the US Marines. Feeling he was too scrawny he got into body building – and that opened up a whole new can of worms.

"I obsessed over my body image," he shares. "Everything revolved around how I looked." Friends told him to slow down because he was "huge already".

But Justin didn't see that – all he saw was his scrawny former self.

"I'd say 'what are you guys talking about? I'm



Justin Macaluso

not huge." One day, out of the blue, he saw his reflection and jerked to a stop.

"I thought 'who is this person who looks like The Hulk'? And then I knew I had really gone too far."

Wanting to reduce his bulk, Justin immediately went gung-ho in the other direction. He cut down on his calories and tried to stop eating junk food – but that just gave rise to a craving for the stuff. Bulimia set in.

"Every time I went to a restaurant I made sure I knew where the bathroom was so I could go after the meal.

"I felt shame every time I ate something bad but I couldn't stop myself because there was always this voice in my head telling me 'It's okay. You can just throw up after.'"

"My condition got out of hand very quickly. I had lost complete control. This thing had me in total bondage. I joined Overeaters Anonymous but nothing helped."

Then he met a girl. Their relationship developed quickly but being a Christian, she broke it off because of Justin's staunch atheism.

As she put the phone down she said: "For what it's worth Justin, read Lee Strobel's book

*A Case for Christ.*"

"Okay," said Justin, but in his heart he thought: "Yeah right. I was devastated she was breaking up with me... and for what? How could she let God dictate her life?"

Yet his curiosity was piqued. He bought the book, smugly convinced it would do nothing to challenge his atheism.

He opened the book. Forty-eight hours later, he shut it, closed his eyes and committed his life to Jesus Christ.

"If you had told me that reading this book would change me I would have said absolutely no way. As an atheist I couldn't think of anything worse than being wrong about God because that would have eternal consequences.

"But the evidence Lee Strobel presented was just overwhelming. I had mocked God my whole life and yet here He was, revealing himself to me in the pages of this book.

"All of a sudden I knew Him. Knew Him more than I knew anything or anyone else, more than I knew my own mother.

"I don't know how else to explain but I suddenly understood what it meant when people say that they've been born again. I felt like I had become a completely different person.

"I had been living in an upside-down world my whole life and then suddenly it got turned right side up.

"I had this deep sense of awe. It was as if I had a hidden file in the back of my mind that said 'open in case God is real'. I never thought I'd ever say this but yes, He is real."

Justin shares that there was no "lightning bolt" miracle that healed his bulimia.

He still struggled with it. But one day after a particularly bad episode, he thought to himself: Hey, why don't I just pray to Jesus?

"You have to understand I was an atheist for so long I wasn't used to having a God I could pray to," he says with a chuckle.

"I just said: 'Please help me Jesus.'" Within weeks Justin was rid of those chains.

"It was just through reading His Word and being renewed in my mind that He set me free."

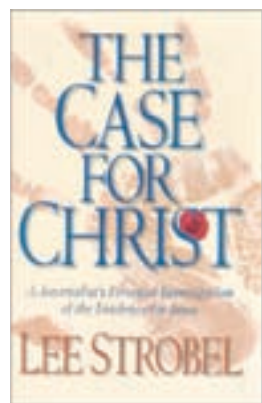
To put it into perspective, he had tried for almost two years to get better. Nothing worked.

"Now it's been 12 years since I prayed and I've never had the urge to throw up food again.

"I never thought that I would become a Christian but here I am and I owe everything to Him.

"I want to give hope and encouragement for fellow believers and for those that don't know Jesus. I want you to know that there's something so wonderful out there that is so much better than anything that this life and this world have to offer."

“Everything revolved around how I looked.”



The book that Justin says changed his life.

## Don't settle for almost

• From page 1

Dawkins couldn't say for certain that God doesn't exist. He would know, as many should know, the evidence tells us God does exist. Believing in the existence of God is the all important step in coming to know God.

The Bible says in Hebrews 11:6: "...for those who come to God must believe that He is, and that He rewards those who diligently seek him."

### Almost persuaded

I read a quotation in a secular magazine which said, "to be almost saved is to be totally lost."

It reminded me of King Agrippa in the New Testament before whom the imprisoned apostle Paul appeared. After hearing about Paul's faith Agrippa said, "You have almost persuaded me to be a Christian." (Acts 26:28)

To which the prisoner replied, "I would to God, that not only you, but also all who hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

Paul had once been as anti-Christian as any man but, having met the risen Christ on the Damascus Road was so persuaded himself that all the opposition and persecution thrown at him couldn't shake him.

Jesus Christ gave His all to save you from your sins – even suffering on a Roman cross. There was no *almost* with Jesus.

Don't settle for *almost* in the issue of faith – eternity is at stake!

See the box on page 11 for assistance in how to be fully committed to Christ and saved for all of eternity.

nudge

WITH KARL FAASE

## The three things we need to be happy

**IN HIS** book with the clever title *Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart*, Gordon Livingstone reflects on happiness. He says that in his years as a professional therapist, many clients have wanted him to make them happy. Livingstone tells them:

"The good news is that we have effective treatments for the symptoms of depression. The bad news is that medication will not make you happy. Happiness is not simply the absence of despair."

He says that all of us need three qualities in life to be happy.

Firstly, someone to love, secondly something to do and thirdly something to look forward to. If we have these three traits we are well on the way to happiness.

Here is why Christian belief can make such a difference: God loves us and gives us the opportunity to love.

We are gifted by God with the opportunity to serve others, and to make a positive contribution to our world. And thirdly, Christians have eternal security promised in Jesus.

God doesn't promise an easy life but God does give us what we need for a joyful life.

## A story worth remembering

BY RUSTY WRIGHT

**YOU'VE** probably seen Santa Claus. But have you ever seen the Easter Bunny?

As a small child, I enjoyed visiting Santa at a local department store at Christmastime. My parents would take me downtown to the jolly bearded man in the red suit.

I felt comfortable climbing into his lap, telling him my wish list and receiving a gift along with his encouraging words. He was friendly, predictable and safe.

Imagine my excitement when I learned that the Easter Bunny would be at the same department store.

Neither I nor my family had ever seen the Easter Bunny.

I had seen white rabbits. Those cute, cuddly little bunnies seemed so warm and innocent. I looked forward for some time to seeing the real Easter Bunny.

### Yikes!

Finally, the big day came. My father took me to the store that afternoon. When we reached the Bunny's floor, I was shocked. Before me was a human-sized hare with big eyes and large, floppy ears. The creature walked on two legs like a human. He talked.

The more clearly I saw him as I approached him, the more slowly I walked. I would not get close to the furry beast.

He wanted to give me a gift, but I was not cooperating. "Just throw it to me," I suggested. He tossed his present across the room, Frisbee-style.

Much as I was confused about the Easter Bunny, many folks are confused about the meaning of Easter itself. For some, it means new clothes and a chance to show them off. Others focus on eggs, candy and special meals.

### Renewal

Easter is also billed as a time of renewal. It may be relatively easy to renew things outwardly – new clothes, a hairstyle, a fancy party. Renewal on the inside can be more difficult.

Problems from the past can haunt one's memory.

Broken relationships undermine self-esteem. Guilt over missed opportunities, pain from rejection, loneliness and anger from past hurts can sometimes create a swirling inner vortex, a psychological suction from which escape is difficult.

Where does one find inner renewal? Some look to friends or family. Counsellors and self-help books provide coping skills.

But maybe a look at the first Easter could also offer some clues. Nearly two millennia ago, a young Jewish leader fell into disfavour with established authorities. He was executed, declared dead, wrapped up like a mommy and placed in a tomb.

A large stone was rolled against the tomb's entrance and a crack unit of Roman soldiers guarded the tomb against grave robbers.

### Risen?

Two days later, the stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty but the grave clothes were still in place. The Man's closest followers, most of whom had abandoned Him during his trials, reported seeing Him alive again. Many later died horrible deaths for telling people that their leader had risen from the dead.

They had been transformed from the inside and it affected every facet of their lives, giving them inner strength, freedom from guilt, love for their enemies and boldness to stand for what they believed was right.

"Anyone who belongs to Christ," wrote one early believer, "has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Sometimes life's challenges can seem as scary as that huge hare seemed to me when I was a child. We don't want to get near them. Yet that first Easter still offers hope.

As Jesus really did come back from the dead, people today can find inner renewal by knowing Him personally.

As we enjoy eggs and rabbits this Easter, might that be a message worth pondering? •

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](http://www.RustyWright.com)



# A HAPPY EASTER FOR JORDAN

Jordan Wilson was a popular teenager who loved to throw parties with his friends. He loved the party lifestyle and everything that went with it from girls to alcohol, to marijuana and pain pills.

"I thought that I was Superman," he told CBN. "I thought that I was invincible." Before long, Jordan was addicted to drugs, spending a hundred dollars a day on pills. Without 20 pills a day, he suffered extreme withdrawal symptoms.

Jordan also became addicted to methamphetamines. To fund his addictions, Jordan and a friend started manufacturing and selling synthetic cannabinoids (Spice). Eventually an informant tipped off the police about Jordan's dealing.

"When I was busted and the police picked me up and threw me on the ground, I was so obliterated from the drugs that I really couldn't grasp just how hot the water was that I was in," Jordan says.

Over the next three years, Jordan was in jail 10 times and kicked out of rehab six times.

"I knew for sure that I was going to die a drug addict," Jordan admits. "I started shooting up. I shot up crystal meth. I was addicted to pills again. And I had no desire to continue living." Jordan's dad, Roger, was at a loss for what to do about his son. A committed Christian, he prayed for a miracle. Roger recalled his son's strong faith as a teenager, before he became consumed with girls and drugs, and walked away from God.

He prayed for Jordan to find his faith again and for God to give him the strength he needed to become sober for good. With the support of his parents, Jordan tried to stop using and began detoxing.

On Easter Sunday in 2016, Roger asked Jordan to attend church with him.

"I said, 'No, Dad, I'm sick, I'm detoxing from drugs. I can't go,'" Jordan remembers. But it was also Roger's birthday, so he asked him again to go, as a birthday present to his father.

"I was 27 years old and I didn't have a birthday gift for my dad," Jordan explains. "I thought, this is the least I can do. And so I agreed to go to church with my dad for his birthday on Easter Sunday."

During that service Jordan recalls feeling the first spark of hope he had felt in years. When the pastor invited people to dedicate their lives to Jesus, Jordan jumped out of his seat. "As I was at that altar, I felt like God was sweeping me off my feet," Jordan shares. "I realized that this is Resurrection Sunday. Jesus Christ has risen."

Roger was over the moon. "It was absolutely, other than the day I watched him be born, the greatest day watching him give his heart back to God," Jordan's dad told CBN.

"I've never been the same since," Jordan says. "I never drank another drop. I never used another drug since that day! So now I'm closer with the Lord than I've ever been, more so than when I was a teenager. But I walk with Him and talk with Him every single day."

"If I don't get that one-on-one time with Jesus every day, I'm just not right... This relationship with Christ has taught me to love people. He has enabled me to care about people. And I realized that my life is bigger than me. I'm not the lead role in my story. He is. And realizing [that] gives me a life truly worth living."

Jordan is married with two children and has written a book called, *Jesus > Drugs: The Only War Won by Surrender*. He is also the development director of a rehab facility he was once kicked out of.

"If you surrender to Christ, He'll fight for you," Jordan says to those who are in the same place he once was. He'll do what you can't do.

"As someone who tried it without Jesus, there is a big difference. You may be able to get sober without Christ, but you'll never be free without Christ. And Christ is what sets people free."



Jordan is now married with two children.



Jordan's mug shots.

"God undertook the most dramatic rescue operation in cosmic history. He determined to save the human race from self-destruction, and He sent His Son Jesus Christ to salvage and redeem them. The work of man's redemption was accomplished at the cross."

Billy Graham



# Set free in a moment

BY JANICE TEO

Standing in an ashram in India with one of the world's most notorious Hindu gurus is not generally where you would expect to find a 15-year-old Australian boy.

Yet there was Marcus McDonnell deep in the dust and sand of the Andhra Pradesh desert in an Indian monastery with Sai Baba, the self-proclaimed Indian holy man who, before his death in 2011, had been widely discredited as a fraud amidst allegations of paedophilia and trickery.

Recalling his experience, Marcus, now 40, tells *Challenge News*: "We were all gathered in the ashram when Sai Baba pointed at me and called me for a one-on-one interview."

"I closed my eyes and I felt his hands on both my shoulders. Then I felt someone approach from behind and place their hand on my right shoulder. An incredible peace overwhelmed me and filled the room. Then he let go of my shoulders."

Marcus opened his eyes and was shocked at what he saw. Sai Baba was nowhere near him – he was in a far corner of the room.

"His mouth was wide open and he looked terrified," Marcus continues. "Then he turned and ran out of the room. As he ran I turned around to see nobody and nothing behind me. I was very confused; I didn't know what had happened."

The teenager was not in India alone; he had been brought there by his father, who had moved into New Age spirituality after being disillusioned with the traditional church. Marcus had had some exposure to Christianity but had not pursued it.

He was seven when his parents got divorced. He lived with his father, who was often busy and left his son unsupervised for long periods. When he was 12, he lived with his mother and stepfather, who, engrossed with the family business, also left Marcus to his own devices.

"My life was extremely lonely," he confesses. "I didn't know how to do relationships well due to my upbringing and I carried a lot of pain and resentment."

"This baggage led me to binge-drinking as a teen, drug use, and eventually, a stint of homelessness."

Perhaps that was why Marcus' father, seeing how lost his son was, brought him to India to experience what he called "alternate spiritual practices".

But four years after the trip that was supposed to answer all his questions, Marcus was as befuddled as ever. "My life was a mess," he says. "The New Age teachings proved to be empty lies and false promises – a carrot dangled but never attained."

In 2000, the 19-year-old was homeless and on drugs.

His mother, an alcoholic, had burnt his possessions.

"It's a strange feeling to have everything taken from you," he says sadly. "You feel powerless, humiliated and very alone."

Every night Marcus would go to bed hoping to wake up feeling less forlorn. Then one night he suddenly remembered his encounter in India with the presence that changed the atmosphere in the room – and seemed to terrify Sai Baba.

"I remembered the hand on my shoulder and the peace that enveloped me, the peace I had been chasing but had not been able to find. Whoever that Presence was, its power had ousted the guru from his own room."

"I remember I felt 'owned' by that Presence and that was what I



Marcus McDonnell with his wife, Racheal.

wanted. I asked myself 'what or who was that?'"

Almost immediately he saw a picture of Jesus in his mind.

"I was startled and I said out loud, 'THAT WAS JESUS?' And at that very moment I said 'Jesus, if that was You, well then I've been wrong for a long time and I give myself to You.'

"Immediately, a feeling I can only describe as liquid gold ran through me like a waterfall, hit the bottom and came rushing back out of me. I was set free from that moment. No more drugs or life-controlling issues."

Marcus, who now pastors a church in New South Wales, says his life has changed for the better in countless ways.

"My bitterness and rejection have fallen off. I had lived with this ball of pain for so long but in one moment it was removed. I can love and trust people once again and not feel undone when they let me down."

"As God healed me, the need to self-medicate and take drugs left. I also understood my parents were just hurting people like me, and the blame I held against them fell away."

"Many people say you should be open to God's plan for your life, but I say there should be no other plan than His!

"Since I've committed my life to Him I have seen miracle after miracle – lives, including my own, have been transformed."

"For years I didn't share my story as I didn't think people would understand or believe it and it would reflect poorly on myself."

"Now I don't care. I am more than happy to look foolish if it means even only one person is reached. All glory to Jesus."

His life verse is, "*Be still and know that I am God*" (Psalm 46: 10).

"The revelation of this word will feed you forever," he says with a smile.

## TURNING DISASTER INTO OPPORTUNITY

BY JON COURSON

In the late 1800s, when cotton was the undisputed king of the South, every cotton plantation in Coffee County, Alabama, was wiped out by the boll weevil. The economic fallout was disastrous, causing the Christians in the little town of Enterprise to meet together and pray, "We thank You, Lord, that you have blessed us for so many years with cotton. Now it's gone, but we know You work all things together for good. So we trust You."

Following their prayer meeting, the town of Enterprise decided to change crops from cotton to peanuts.

Now, although peanuts at the time were virtually unknown, there was a man of exceptional intelligence who, in that same year, was also talking to the Lord. George Washington Carver, who had a deep interest in astronomy, prayed, "Father, teach me the secrets of the universe." Then he hung his head and said, "Lord, I know that's too presumptuous to ask. Just teach me about the peanut."

And how the Lord answered his prayer! Beginning in 1895, Carver developed over 300 products from the lowly peanut — of which the primary discovery, as far as I'm concerned, was peanut butter!

As a result of Carver's discoveries, suddenly there was an unexpected, unprecedented demand for peanuts. And Coffee County began to prosper beyond belief. What had been a disaster became a blessing. What had been adversity became prosperity — all because instead of being eaten up by the worm of negativity, the people of Enterprise glorified God.

If you go to Enterprise today, you will see a monument in the town square with a boll weevil on top and this inscription below:

*In profound appreciation for the boll weevil and what he has done as the herald of prosperity, the monument is erected by the grateful citizens of Coffee County, Alabama. "All things work together for good" (see Romans 8:28).*





# A medic talks mutations

**M**utations in human cells, or mitochondria, don't behave in real life the way they do in comics. You don't become invincible or turn into Wolverine or Captain America if your cells go rogue.

Quite the opposite in fact, says Queensland doctor Bettina Fung. "Mutations cause disastrous consequences, resulting in physical and psychological suffering....they have produced degeneration, disease, misery, and suffering."

Bettina, who emigrated from Hong Kong to Australia with her parents after graduating in 2021, says our mitochondria (membrane-bound organelles inside our cells) are affected by a wide range of diseases.

"The grim reality is that mutations lead to dysfunction, which occurs in varying degrees in the brain, kidneys, muscles, heart, eyes, ears, and elsewhere."<sup>1</sup>

As a doctor Bettina is naturally drawn to diseases, their causes and their treatment.

But there is also a spiritual reason for her interest.

A born-again Christian, she believes in the Biblical account of creation — namely that God created the world in six days — and says that everything in biology proves the work of a Divine Designer.

"Six-day creation is perfectly logical to me since I believe God has the power to create the world in even a fraction of a second," she told *Creation Magazine*.

"Since my youth, it has been crystal clear to me that there is a Creator behind all the things we now see—every creature on earth or in the sky or sea; the air we breathe which keeps us alive; the water that comes from the sky that hydrates us; the food that grows from soil that satisfies us."

But the wonders outside are nothing compared to the inside of the human body.

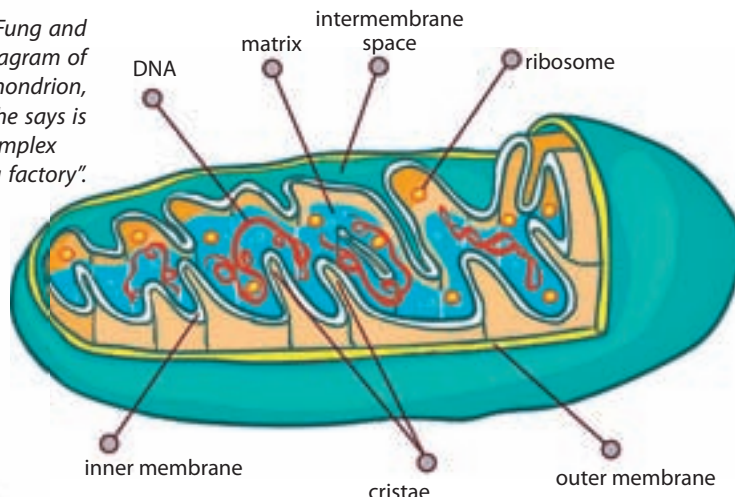
"Studying medicine in Hong Kong further strengthened my faith and my belief that creation is the truth," Bettina shares.

"I had medical professors who were great Christians and taught us about the well-designed mitochondria."

A mitochondrion, she explains, is "as complex as a factory" but condensed into the tiny size of 0.5–3 µm (about the same size as a small bac-



Dr Bettina Fung and (right) a diagram of a mitochondrion, which she says is "as complex as a factory".



diseases and death—they don't produce new structures or cellular pathways or 'super humans' with endless energy," Bettina explains.

"Mutations just lead to diseases, not improvement.

"The mutation causing a particular disease can be inherited as an autosomal (non-sex-linked) recessive gene, which means there is a 25 per cent chance that an offspring will inherit the disease. Where the gene is dominant, the chance is 50 per cent.

"Mitochondria have their own DNA. A disease-causing mutation in that will have a 100 per cent chance of being inherited (from an affected mother; sons do not pass it on).

"Some mitochondrial diseases have a variable age of onset.

"These include Kearns-Sayre syndrome (KSS), Leigh's disease, and MELAS (characterized by mitochondrial encephalomyopathy, lactic acidosis and stroke-like episodes). These diseases are caused directly by mitochondrial mutations.

"The symptoms of mitochondrial disease...may range from poor growth or developmental delay to hearing impairment, seizures, stroke, heart failure, diabetes."<sup>4</sup>

Tragically, mitochondrial diseases are currently incurable. Only supportive treatment with symptomatic relief can be provided.

"To sum up, a random change (mutation) in the genetics of mitochondria causes disastrous consequences, resulting in physical and psychological suffering.

terium— invisible to the naked eye).

"Each one works to produce energy (in the form of adenosine triphosphate—ATP) from sugar and oxygen, utilising an amazing miniature electric motor."<sup>2</sup>

"It is like a power plant that supports our lives as well as the lives of many other creatures, including plants."

Bettina says mitochondrial numbers are precisely regulated in each cell according to need. "They can also travel within a cell along special 'railway tracks' (cytoskeletal microtubules)."<sup>3</sup>

This level of precision and sophistication in the cells' structure and mechanism make it "self-evident that they could only be so ingeniously designed by a super-intelligent Creator.

"When we see a well-made Rolex watch or a motorcar, we know that each had to be designed by intelligent and specialised designers. The mitochondria are much more complex than a Rolex watch!"

She also takes aim at evolution, which champions the theory that living things are supposed to proceed from simpler to more complex via mutations adding new functions.

"Mutations are accidental changes to the existing DNA code, the inherited information that each generation receives from the preceding one.

"We do see mutations happening from time to time, but they lead to

“Mutations just lead to diseases, not improvement.”

## The world's oldest color?

### PETER'S CORNER

**THE** world's oldest biological color is pink. Bright neon pink. Or so the scientists announced in 2018, describing research done at the ANU in Canberra. They had extracted organic molecules called porphyrins from marine black shale rocks from Mauritania in Africa — shales that were well known as containing microbial fossil cyanobacteria. Porphyrins are ring molecules important for the color of biological substances such as hemoglobin and chlorophyll. On this occasion the porphyrins had a purple color, which becomes pink if diluted.

The scientists were awestruck thinking that these color molecules could survive for such a long time. How long? 1,100,000,000 years. That is the alleged evolutionary age of the Precambrian strata in which the shales with the fossils, were positioned.

But that age is impossible for any organic substance. The laws of chemistry dictate that organic substances will gradually decompose — even in the fridge, that KFC chicken left over from the party last week is going to break down quite soon.

Under ideal conditions, some organics may last up

to 20,000 years. That is way too short, at best 0.002% of the alleged age. The difference is like comparing an ant making an 11 metre walk to your letterbox, to the ant making a 600 km walk from Kalgoorlie to Perth! Impossible.

Question: Which is correct, the laws of chemistry, or the enormous age of the color molecules? Answer: The law — it always wins, every time. The evolutionary age is very wrong, but a short Biblical age fits the evidence perfectly. Sorry to disappoint, but pink may not in fact be the oldest color after all.

Again, time after time, the real credit goes to God, not man.

There are many examples of how creation makes very good scientific sense. I hope these words help you, as they have me, in your journey to surely trust the Creator. 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.

**Believe it or not**  
BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

## Turtles fossilized while mating!

BY DAVID CATCHPOOLE

'EXCITEMENT' doesn't even begin to describe it. The announcement of the world's first-ever discovery of copulating vertebrates fossilized "in flagrante delicto"<sup>2,3</sup> was a news editor's dream.<sup>4</sup>

Note that it wasn't just one aquatic turtle pair, but nine of them.<sup>5</sup>

As lead researcher Walter Joyce told *Discovery News*, "the chances of both partners dying at the same time is highly unlikely and the chances of both partners being preserved afterwards even less likely."<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, these pairs of turtles are much better understood as a legacy of rapid burial in the global Flood of Noah's day, as the Bible recounts.

First, note their having been described as very well preserved: "incredible fossil specimens,"<sup>5</sup> "truly exceptional fossils"<sup>4</sup>

Second, note that these turtles, identified as *Allaeochelys crassesculpta*, "would have looked very similar to ... the pig-nosed turtle (*Carettochelys insculpta*) ... just much smaller."<sup>4</sup> In other words, despite supposedly 47 million years having elapsed since the fossilization of these turtle pairs,<sup>6</sup> they're just the same as turtles today—no evolution.

Third, despite paleontologists' protestations that "it is rare for any animal to die and be fossilized while engaged in a behaviour"<sup>5</sup> their own documentation is replete with such examples.<sup>5</sup>

The evidence for the year-long planetary cataclysm Genesis describes is all around us and under our feet.

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# Youth Truth

## LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING



Carlos PenaVega (second from right) performing with fellow Big Time Rush members James Maslow, Logan Henderson and Kendall Schmidt. (Photo by Gerardo Mora/Getty Images for iHeartRadio).

## I found something better than a rush

American singer and actor Carlos PenaVega is well-known for his role as Carlos Garcia in the Nickelodeon television series *Big Time Rush*.

However, he is becoming equally well-known for his role in an even bigger production – sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“I grew up Catholic,” Carlos told *Faithwire* in an interview. “I did like the whole first communion ... all that stuff, but it never meant anything. It was just ticking a box.”

“I knew of God, but I didn’t have a relationship with Him.”

He revealed that he had dated a Christian girl in college and would go to church with her occasionally, but still felt like all he was doing was ticking the right boxes and then “moving on”.

It wasn’t until Carlos, in his own words, “hit rock bottom” that he got serious about his faith.

“I was smoking a lot of weed,” he recalled.

“I was drinking, and I was sleeping around.”

“I locked myself in my house, and I was ordering food, and I was just miserable. I was in a really dark place. I had broken up with a girlfriend and done some things I wasn’t proud of. I knew that there was something more for me.”

In the midst of his doldrums, he reached out to a friend named Andrew and asked him why he was always so happy.

“He said to me ‘Oh, man, I got Jesus,’ and I immediately hung up the phone. I didn’t want Jesus to be the answer.”

Andrew did finally manage to convince Carlos to go to church with him one Sunday – and that’s when everything changed.

The pastor told the congregation all about his life before he met God.

He said: “I was smoking drugs; I was sleeping around.”

Carlos was stunned – “that was me too! He preaches his whole sermon, literally directly into my soul and after it finishes, I was just like ‘this

is what I want.” As a result of what he heard, Carlos surrendered his life to Jesus and everything changed. His whole motivation for living was completely turned around.

“From then on it’s just like my heart was pierced and I was ready to go. Everything that I’ve done since then, my first instinct is ‘what would Jesus do?’ and ‘is what I’m doing for the kingdom of God?’”

It is not always an easy job. Carlos admits it’s a struggle to follow Christ in a world that hates God.

“I always tell people that Christianity is not convenient,” he says. “It’s the easiest decision but the hardest

thing that I’ve ever had to do is walk this walk, because you are hit with so many obstacles.”

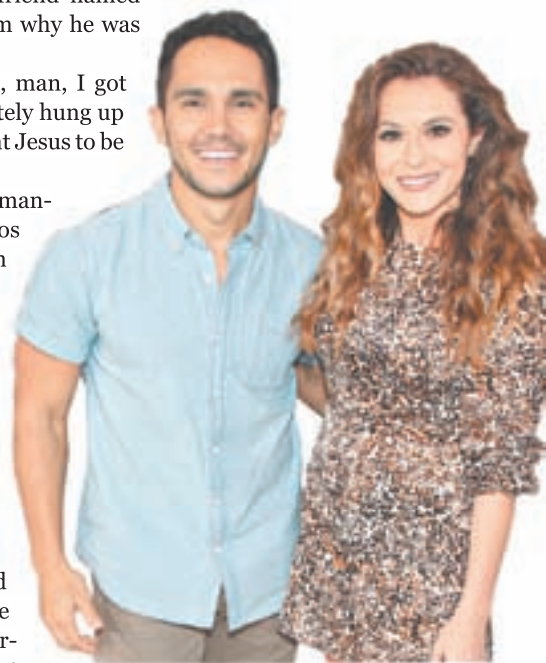
He and his wife, actress Alexa PenaVega, have penned their faith journey in a book titled *What if Love is the Point: Living for Jesus in a Self-Consumed World?*

Carlos told *Faithwire* that being successful in Hollywood is no longer his main focus – instead he wants to concentrate on sharing the Gospel.

“I always tell people that acting, singing all this stuff to me – producing, writing – it’s a hobby.”

“My job is to spread God’s love to everyone ... That’s my job. Everything else is a hobby.”

“My heart was pierced and I was ready to go.”



Carlos and Alexa PenaVega. (Photo by Paul Archuleta/Getty Images)

When Natalia Lavaggi faced multiple health issues, she looked for natural and alternative ways to heal herself. Eventually she turned to practices that at first appeared innocent, but she soon discovered that looks can be deceiving.

In a video on Sarah Nowbloom’s YouTube channel, Natalia says she had always been a “spiritually sensitive” person. Her search for healing led her to the Law of Attraction and New Age practices like tarot card reading, channelling and energy healing like reiki. Natalia also started using marijuana for pain relief, but became addicted to it.

As she progressed deeper into the New Age movement, she also started practicing as an energy body worker.

Natalia met with other people who were also involved in these practices. One time her mother, who is a Christian, asked her whether she involved Jesus in these meetings. But Natalia brushed off her mother’s words.

When Natalia was a child she had found comfort in praying to Jesus when her home life was chaotic.

“I would speak to God openly. (I knew) that He was there and that I wasn’t alone,” she remembers.

But as a teenager Natalia no longer felt a personal connection to God and started to drift away from Him. She had never been able to fully reject the existence of Jesus, however, and thought of Him as an “ascended master.”

After Natalia married and had a baby, she experienced post-natal depression and had no desire to use the New Age practices she had before. She had also stopped smoking marijuana while pregnant and breastfeeding but, after weaning the baby, she began smoking again. This time, she felt overwhelming anxiety.

In an attempt to heal the anxiety, she started using the New Age tools again. But nothing alleviated her anxious thoughts. She also began experiencing sleep paralysis.



Natalia Lavaggi

“I would be in a half-awake half-sleep state, lying in bed and I could feel a weight on my body and I would be choking in my sleep,” Natalia recalls. “I was meditating, I was going to see different healers and different shamans and different gurus and seeking advice and doing the tarot card readings and smudging my home and doing affirmations,

but nothing was working... I felt so emotionally and mentally and physically and spiritually exhausted.”

None of the healers could give her an answer as to why she was being choked in her sleep or why she never felt at peace.

Natalia began have a recurring dream. In the dream, she and her husband were being chased by a demonic entity, but it kept growing bigger and bigger. When they reached a dead end, her husband asked her, “Why is it that you’re not afraid? What do we do?”

“I would say, ‘This thing can’t touch us – just watch.’ And I would turn and I would look at this demonic entity, which was the most horrible-looking thing anyone could imagine, and I would put my hand out and a beam of light would come out and I said at the same time, ‘You cannot pass and you cannot touch me in the name of Jesus Christ.’ And a light beam would shoot out of my hand and shatter the demon into billions of pieces.”

When Natalia shared the dream with her mother, she encouraged her daughter to return to Jesus.

The next day, Natalia found her old Bible that she had not read for 13 years. She cried out to God and asked Him to reveal the truth about Himself.

“In that moment I felt such a personal love come into the room and envelop me. It wasn’t anything like the meditations that I did, because meditating would allow for me to feel empty and void... this love was so personal, so tangible. It felt like a blanket and the loving arms of a Father just wrapped around me.”

Natalia then watched a video on YouTube about an ex-New Age healer who now follows Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He had experienced similar sleep paralysis and nightmares to Natalia and when he called on the name of Jesus, they stopped. He said Jesus is the answer and the Bible is the truth. As he said that, Natalia felt instantly convinced.

“In that moment I fell on my knees and I thanked God so much for being so bold and so loving and for answering my prayer instantly in such a personal way ... I gave my life to Jesus Christ that night and I’ve never looked back since.”

## I now know fatherly love

BY JOSIE LUKE

As a child, I was sexually abused by a number of different men. This abuse, alongside my biological father’s absence, led to me to seek out male affection the only way I knew how: sex. Of course, this was emotionally and spiritually destructive – and with time, I began to self-harm and self-sabotage. I also developed severe depression and anxiety, which left me feeling trapped, broken, and hopeless.

One day, I lost control of my thoughts. My mind was filled with thoughts of suicide, gore, panic, and fear.

My family never went to church or talked about

Jesus, but in my desperation, I started praying. I told God things I’d never told anyone and in return, the Spirit [the unseen presence of God] began to move in my life. In that moment, the Lord touched me and I felt His peace unlike anything I’d ever experienced. For the first time, I felt alive!

During this encounter, God awakened my desire to know Him. I suddenly found myself wanting to pray more and read the Bible.

As I went deeper with Him, I began to see just how much He loved me. I realized that His presence had always been there and would always be there, contrary to the lies of the enemy. Not only did the Lord open my eyes to His truth, but He also sent a community of Jesus-loving people to help me walk with Him.

I never thought I’d experience fatherly love, but I’ve found that in Christ. Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, I now know my heavenly Father... my true Father, who loves me so much that He sent his Son to die for me! Despite my past!

Don’t believe the lie that your past or present sins are too much for God. If you put your trust in Him, He will meet you where you are. He CAN and WILL wash you clean and free you from sin’s grip. And no matter your pain, He is with you; “The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18). He’s a good, good Father!

As told to and edited by Adira Polite and originally published on Then God Moved



Josie Luke

“For the first time, I felt alive!”

“This love was so personal.”





## Easter hot cross buns

### Ingredients

625g plain flour	80g caster sugar
20g fresh yeast (or 1½ tsp fast-action)	
275ml milk	1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons ground mixed spice	
1 medium egg	85g mixed dried fruit

### Preparation

1. First pour milk into two mugs. Take one mug and heat it up in the microwave for a few seconds (the milk can't be too cold or too hot – lukewarm is the right temperature). Add fresh yeast and a tablespoon of sugar. Mix. In the second mug, mix the milk with one egg until well combined. Set both mugs aside for later.
2. Sift the flour in a large bowl. Add caster sugar, salt, ground mixed spice and mix until well combined. Pour in the contents of both mugs (make sure the fresh yeast has formed a foam – if not, then wait a bit longer). Now using a wooden spoon combine all the ingredients. Transfer onto a floured surface and knead for 5 minutes to get elastic dough.
3. Grease the same bowl with some oil and place the dough inside. Cover with a clean kitchen towel and let it rise in a warm place for 1 hour.
4. Once the dough has risen, transfer it onto the floured surface and using your fist, knock it down. Now add dried fruit in the middle of the dough and start bringing the edges towards the middle (like if you wanted to cover the fruits). Start kneading slowly and knead until the fruits have moved around (you should be able to see or feel that the fruit is spread throughout the dough).
5. When ready, stretch and flatten the dough (use a rolling pin, if needed). Using a cookie cutter cut out about 15-18 pieces. Roll them into balls. If you end up with cut-offs simply form balls out of them.
6. Place on a baking tray lined with baking paper and cover with a kitchen towel. Let them rise for 1 hour.
7. Once risen, you can either make crosses with flour (and water) or wait until they are cooked and use icing sugar (and water) instead. In both cases the mixtures should be quite thick but still easy to pipe (always use less water than flour/sugar).
8. Bake them in a preheated oven at 200°C for 15 minutes or until baked through.
9. Serve cold, warm or toasted with butter and jam! Enjoy!

# A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER

When David Oyelowo was a teenager, a girl he had a crush on asked him on a date to the theatre. David agreed and, while the relationship didn't work out, his love for acting blossomed from there. From humble beginnings in roles in that same theatre, the British actor's career has grown to starring in major motion pictures such as *Selma*, *Jack Reacher* and *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*. He has also been nominated for Golden Globe and Emmy awards and was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for his services to drama.

In 2020, David made his directorial debut with *The Water Man*. The film also starred his wife, Jessica, who also composed and performed several songs for the movie.

The couple met at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art when she was 17 and David was 19.

"We became friends for quite a while and it became clear that we were just kidding ourselves and we got married," David told *The Independent*. The pair bonded over their Christian faith and the fact that Jessica's grandparents had been Christian missionaries and David's grandparents were converted to Christianity by missionaries in Nigeria. David

was raised attending a Baptist church with his family.

"At the age of 16 I realized that I was pretty much piggy-backing on my parents' faith," he says. "So I did this really naive, odd thing which was to say, 'Okay God, if You exist, I'm going to go to a different church because I find

mine very boring, and if You don't turn up for me in three months I'm done.' And for me He turned up in a very palpable, undeniable way. I literally heard God speak to me about how much He loved me. That voice never abated. Like any relationship, it becomes deeper. It's a hard thing to explain – it's

like explaining love to someone who has never fallen in love."

David now prays to God for wisdom when choosing roles. "Sometimes I don't like the answer, but sometimes it's when He crosses my will that it is the most useful," he says.

In an interview with the *Christian Post*, Jessica explains what *The Water Man*'s key theme of sacrificial love means for her and David: "What we believe personally is that we live once, we die once, we're judged once," she

shares. "If we're with Jesus [then] heaven is the only place we can be. He is the key, He is the way, He is the truth, He is the life. There is no way to the Father except through him."

David and Jessica are now based in the United States. They have been married for more than 20 years and have four children.

“  
Like any relationship, it becomes deeper.”

”



David and Jessica Oyelowo at the 91st Annual Academy Awards in 2019. (Photo by Steve Granitz/WireImage)



## Surprised by Oxford movie: Remediating broken relationships

BY RUSTY WRIGHT

EVER feel awkward opening yourself emotionally in a relationship? Got any family issues that make trusting others difficult? Does that affect your social life, job, or home life? Do you ever use work, studies, or accomplishments to bolster your self-image when, inside, you're hiding from others? Perhaps you'll resonate with this film's protagonist.

Carolyn Drake, a brilliant student, receives a full scholarship to pursue her academic holy grail, an Oxford University doctorate. Headstrong, determined, and deeply wounded by family desertion, she struggles with fears, love needs and relationship complexities.

*Surprised by Oxford*, based on a true story, conveys Carolyn's journey to reconcile her troubled family experience with her desires for friendship, romance, and finding her life's purpose. The film's breathtaking Oxford scenery complements its focus on reason, skepticism, romance, humor, sorrow, and fulfillment.

### Daddy's gone

"Caro," as Carolyn is nicknamed, announced as a young child that her life's desire was "a doctorate." Her childhood was difficult. In some ways, she loved her father, but a sheriff's arrest and domestic conflict removed him from her family. He was seldom home. Whenever he returned, so did trouble.

Caro mistrusted men, threw herself into her studies, and sought security in her accomplishments to hide herself from close relationships that might bring pain. Into her Oxford life comes a male student she calls "TDH" (tall, dark,



TDH (Ruairi O'Connor) and Caro (Rose Reid). Photo Chris Cox.

and handsome).

Though initially guarded, Caro warms to his friendship but makes her independence clear, sometimes in humorous ways. She rejects his chivalrous courtesies. As they walk together on Oxford sidewalks, when he politely shifts positions to walk on the traffic side, she counters by maneuvering back to the traffic side.

### Relative truth? Absolutely sure?

Caro enjoys Oxford's diverse social and cultural opportunities, and her precise logic and courage guide her interaction with her classmates, TDH, and professors. At a public lecture, a distinguished scholar

asserts that truth is relative. Caro asks him publicly, if all truth is relative, why should they believe him? By his own reasoning, his denial of absolutes cannot be absolutely true. As she and TDH grow closer, Caro finds herself opening up to him, in sometimes scary ways. You see, TDH's father is a pastor.

“  
Something is missing in my life.”

”

In her memoir, which inspired the film, Caro notes similarities with the famous Dusty Springfield song, that the only one who could ever reach her was the *Son of a Preacher Man*. But she says, "I had no real

need of believing in men, God incarnate or otherwise."

TDH respects her faith-skepticism and sympathizes with her psychological distress, while encouraging her to consider looking outside her humanity for ultimate security. Caro peppers TDH with important questions such as: Why do men treat women so poorly? How could a loving God allow evil and suffering? Why should I believe the Bible? How do we know Jesus is who he claimed to be?

### Testing men

"Testing men," she says in her memoir, "was one of my little hobbies." But she feels "something is missing in my life," so she keeps searching. In the film, TDH recommends CS Lewis' *Surprised by Joy*. Caro found intriguing the argument that Jesus' claim to deity logically allowed just three possibilities for his true nature: he was either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord.

She decides to dig deeper. Along the way, she grapples with her emotional insecurities and family conflicts, reflecting that, "I would have traded every accomplishment for a close relationship with my father." She experiences a roller coaster relationship with TDH.

Reason? Romance? Reconciliation? I won't spoil these outcomes for you.

*Surprised by Oxford* had me reminiscing about my own time there, as well as my own psychological struggles, relationship rides, emotional intelligence development (still learning), and faith skepticism. An entertaining, thought-provoking, moving film.

This article first appeared on WashingtonExaminer.com

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](http://www.RustyWright.com)

## Straight from the Good Book

BY MAL DAVIES

FOR 2000 years, Christianity has had a huge influence on various parts of our culture, including the arts, literature and music. Not surprisingly, this includes an influence on what could be classed broadly as "popular music" – the music that has "hit the charts" since the arrival of rock 'n' roll in the late 1950s.

Sometimes this is blatantly obvious, especially in songs that either use Bible text directly (such as Boney M's *Rivers of Babylon* based on Psalm 137, or Pete Seeger's *Turn! Turn! Turn!* based on Ecclesiastes 3); or refer to God or Jesus directly (such as Norman Greenbaum's *Spirit in the Sky* or Joan Osborne's *One of Us*).

Other songs, however, are more subtle; sometimes using a phrase from the Bible or alluding to something related to Christianity or the church. A good example is Van Morrison's *Bright Side of the Road*, in which he sings: "And time seems to go by so fast/ In the twinkling of an eye."

Most listeners wouldn't, I assume, pick up on it, but as he sings this, Van Morrison quotes the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, the apostle Paul is writing prophetically about the last days and eternal life and he says, "We will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye." A few other examples of artists referring to the Bible would be Momford & Sons' *Babel* (referencing Genesis 11), Sia's *Eye of the Needle* (Matthew 19), Hozier's *Movement* (Jonah 2) and Bon Jovi's *Blaze of Glory* (Genesis 4) just for starters.

It's hard to imagine what the world would look like if all the Bible references suddenly disappeared. Every time you sing about the "broken-hearted", you're quoting Psalm 34:18; "A sign of the times" is from Matthew 16:3; to "harden your heart" is from Exodus 4:21 and the "apple of your eye" comes from Deuteronomy 32:10.

So pay attention when you next sing along to a song – you might be quoting the Bible!

Major Mal Davies is a Salvation Army officer (pastor) in South Australia.

This article was first published in *Salvos Magazine* and is used with kind permission.



# Building better relationships

## Where does the question of suffering take you?

BY ROB FURLONG

THE story is told of an ancient holy man who sought to raise his child by shielding him from the influence of evil and suffering in the world. He determined that if he could obtain the ashes from the fire of a home that had not known suffering, he would bring them to his house as a protective charm for his son. He searched many months for such a home but found none, eventually returning home without the ashes, but certainly a wiser man.

No one is exempt from suffering, not even kings. Thousands of years ago, King David wrote a song of lament, crying out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

There is nothing from the life of David that explains what motivated him to write these words, but what is clear is his feeling that God had rejected him.

Consider how he described his emotions:

"Why have you abandoned me?"

It's a raw and honest cry of grief which does not spring from David's bitterness, but from his confusion that he believed God had forsaken him. For David, it felt as if God's protective presence had been withdrawn and his enemies were closing in quickly.

"Where are you God?" he screams.

This column is about building better relationships, so this Easter I'm asking you:

"How is your relationship with

God?" Does it feel distant, as if He has abandoned you and is not listening to you?

It may surprise you to learn that a careful reading of the Bible reveals that people – the great and the small, rich, or poor, popular, or insignificant – asked God the same question on a regular basis, and they discovered it was ok to do this!

Equally surprising is the fact that the people who felt this way – abandoned by God – were regarded as being good people – why would God allow this to happen to them?

The idea that God blesses good people and punishes those who are evil has had almost universal acceptance throughout history, but the problem is that our experience of life tells us otherwise.

Are you grappling with the feeling that you are being unfairly treated by God at this time – that He has abandoned you?

Then take heart with this: Jesus felt the same way.

One thousand years after David penned his complaint to God, Jesus uttered the same words as He hung on the cross, dying for the sins of the world:

"My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?"

In that awful moment of suffering,

Jesus felt in the depth of His being that He was alone, forsaken by His Father, but just a short time later, he cried, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" dying in peaceful and confident trust in God.

I said earlier it's okay to bring your complaint to God, but the important thing to keep in mind is where the question takes you – to God or away from Him? Asking the question is one thing, resolving it is another.

Jesus shows us the way. We can bring our complaint to God, but having done that, we can rest and trust in His goodness, love, and grace toward us.

We can be confident He does hear us,

and although the situation may not immediately turn in our favour, we can know that our Father is with us, just as He was with Jesus.

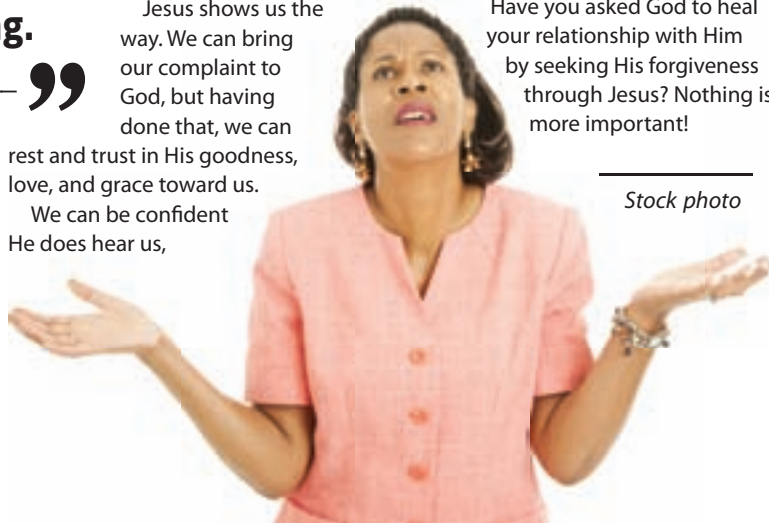
This is why Jesus died – to bring each one of us to His Father – to restore our broken relationship with Him.

"How is your relationship with God?" Distant, feeling like He has abandoned you?

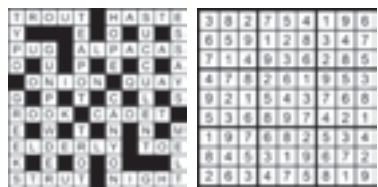
Pour out your complaint to Him today and allow Him to lead you to the place of peace and trust in Him.

Have you asked God to heal your relationship with Him by seeking His forgiveness through Jesus? Nothing is more important!

Stock photo



**“No one is exempt from suffering.”**



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## 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

nudge

WITH KARL FAASE

## Are you committed or interested?

IT'S IMPORTANT in life to recognise the difference between being interested and being committed. We are interested in many areas of life but that does not make us committed.

For instance, I am interested in politics. I read political biographies and follow the Australian political scene with great interest.

But I have never joined a political party, have never run for office and never involved myself in a political campaign or given out how-to-vote cards for anyone. I may be interested in politics but I am not committed.

In the areas that really matter we need to make a commitment.

That means we need to commit our time, energy, resources and skills. It is not enough to show interest in areas of importance, we need to demonstrate commitment. This is crucially important in faith and belief.

Jesus does not ask us to be interested in following Him. He actually asks us to put everything else aside and follow Him completely.

This is really asking you to be more than interested.

It's asking you to be committed.

## 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 <a href="http://challengenews.online">challengenews.online</a></b>	



### Q: Are there contradictions in the Bible?

A: While some claim that the Bible is full of contradictions, this simply isn't true. The number of apparent contradictions is actually remarkably small for a book of the Bible's size and scope. What apparent discrepancies do exist are more of a curiosity than a calamity. They do not touch on any major event or article of faith.

Here is an example of a so-called contradiction. Pilate ordered that a sign be posted on the cross where Jesus hung. Three of the gospels record what was written on that sign:

In Matthew: "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews." In Mark: "The king of the Jews." In John: "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews."

The wording is different, hence the apparent contradiction. The remarkable thing, though, is that all three writers describe the same event in such detail – Jesus was crucified. On this, they all agree. They even record that a sign was posted on the cross, and the meaning of the sign is the same in all three accounts!

What about the exact wording? The gospels were originally written in the Greek language, which didn't use a quotation symbol as we do today to indicate a direct quote. The gospel writers were making an indirect quote, which would account for the subtle differences in the passages.

Here is another example of an apparent contradiction. Was Jesus in the tomb for two or three nights before His resurrection? Jesus said, prior to his crucifixion, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). Mark records another statement that Jesus made, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles, who will mock Him and spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him. Three days later He will rise" (Mark 10:33,34).

Jesus was killed on Friday and the resurrection was discovered on Sunday. How can that be three days and nights in the tomb? It was a Jewish figure of speech in Jesus' time to count any part of a day or night as a full day and night. So Friday, Saturday, and Sunday would be called three days and three nights in Jesus' culture. We speak in similar ways today – if a person were to say, "I spent all day shopping," we understand that the person didn't mean 24 hours.

This is typical of apparent contradictions in the New Testament. Most are resolved by a closer examination of the text itself or through studying the historical background.

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





*Beneil Dariush of Iran punches Mateusz Gamrot of Poland in a lightweight fight during the UFC 280 event at Etihad Arena on October 22, 2022 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. (Photo by Chris Unger/Zuffa LLC/Getty Images)*

# TOUGH GUY FINDS TRUE GRIT

**M**ixed martial artist Beneil Dariush is currently ranked No.4 in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) lightweight rankings but eight years ago he was pursuing a different sport.

Beneil and his family moved from their farm in Iran to America when he was nine. At 18 he began training in Brazilian jiu-jitsu and earned his black belt in five years. He became a no-gi world champion as a blue, purple, and brown belt.

He explains in an interview with Run N Tell on YouTube that he moved to UFC when he was 25 after his mother confided in him that the family was struggling financially.

"It's okay mom, I got it," Beneil told his mother.

"Then I went into my room and I sat down and I was like, 'Why did I say that? What am I gonna do?'"

Beneil considered quitting fighting and getting a 9-5 job but he hated the idea.

"I was in such a bad place, I actually started to pray," he recalls.

Beneil had been raised attending an Aramaic church at Easter and Christmas but he says it was more of a "cultural thing".

"So I just was like, 'Alright God, if You're real, if You're up there, give me something.' A week or two later, I got a call for a professional fight in Brazil."

The only problem was that it was a professional MMA fight and at that point, Beneil had only trained in jiu-jitsu.

But when he was offered the opportunity to fight MMA, he says, "I didn't want to sound like a wimp,"

and agreed.

Beneil began training immediately for the fight, which was in six weeks.

Against the odds, he won the fight and the pay cheque that went with it. He remembers handing it over to his mother with pride until he realized his winnings wouldn't last forever. There were payments to be made every month.

"I went back into my room and I prayed again and I was just like, 'Alright, You did it once, but I need another one. I don't know if You're really up there. I need to know if that was really You.'"

Then he had a call from a friend, asking if Beneil could train with him. He agreed and after their first

session, the friend insisted on paying Beneil.

"All of a sudden I was working with him three or four times a week. I got another coaching job somewhere else — they just kept offering me jobs to teach and all while still fighting."

Beneil was making enough money to survive which was bolstered every now and again by his fight wins. He says he started to feel guilty that it seemed as though he received everything he prayed for and wondered what God wanted from him in return.

He remembered an old wrestling coach he had who was also a pastor, Josh Holiday, and gave him a call.

Josh invited him to come to church and Beneil showed up the next weekend — dressed in his Sunday best.

"[Josh] was wearing just jeans and a T-shirt and I was like, 'Okay I may have made a mistake here!' But I sat through the service. I was very uncomfortable."

"The music wasn't something I was used to, the message wasn't something I was used to... but then I showed up again the next week and the next week and the next week and as I was showing up something was happening. I kept hearing about Jesus and the sacrifice and the cross. So I picked up my Bible and I started reading it."

Beneil read the entire Bible from front to back.

He says he "started to understand

the cross". When he finished reading it, he started again.

"At the same time I gave my life to the Lord," he shares.

Beneil now says he recognises that his talents come from God.

**“ I don't fight out of hate anymore. ”**

"The whole purpose of my career is to point to my Lord and Savior Jesus," he says in an interview with Brian Sumner.

"People forget fighting isn't just violence. It

doesn't necessarily mean violence if two people stop for a fight — it all depends on their intentions ... I believe fighting is the ultimate form of competition ...

"I don't fight out of hate anymore, I don't fight out of anger anymore — I focus on being disciplined. I focus on what is my motivation and what is my goal. The goal is to

glorify God."

Last year a video of Beneil went viral regarding his comments about Iranian protestors.

The demonstrations started in September when a woman was arrested for allegedly ignoring the government's requirements to wear hijabs or head coverings. She died in custody three days later.

"My people in Iran, I know you are struggling," he said in an in-cage interview. "I know you are fighting for freedom. I want you guys to know we're praying for you and we love you."

He went on to say, "There is true freedom — a freedom that no one can take from you — in the name of Jesus Christ, the son of God. Don't ever forget that. If you remember one thing I say, remember that."

Some news outlets referred to his final comments as "bizarre", but for Beneil, his faith is the foundation of his life.



*Beneil Dariush (photo by Chris Unger/Zuffa LLC).*

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