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REASONABLE DOUBT

In the courtroom of life, Jeff Owenby thought he had reached a verdict. But reasonable doubt created weak spots in his beliefs until he eventually had no choice but to overturn his convictions.

BY JEFF OWENBY

A criminal lawyer making his closing arguments to a jury might use the term 'reasonable doubt'. If there's a shred of belief, or a nagging question about guilt, or innocence, then there exists such a doubt. If you've never believed in God, or any of the stories you've heard, but there is a tiny weak spot in your beliefs, then you're no doubt being called by the Holy Spirit (the unseen presence of God). It is the Holy Spirit – who provides the unbeliever with reasonable doubt in his own belief system.

I had my own courtroom; I remember the day I sat in a church learning about how Jesus calmed a storm. At the time I didn't know Jesus; I knew of Him, but I didn't truly know Him. I'd heard the same message preached in churches before and took it as pure fairy tale; the world had made me a very hard man, and I didn't believe in fairy tales or what sounded like science fiction.

I married into a Christian family, but didn't want anything to do with religion. When I met my wife she was walking away from her faith and lived the same sinful life

I was living. I loved my in-laws truly, but I didn't want their lifestyle at all. Religion radically interfered with my agenda therefore I had no room for it.

My childhood upbringing was difficult; our family moved from house-to-house every year, and I attended a different school each time. I had no lasting relationships, and my father was an alcoholic which was the cause of our many moves. God was never really a part of our household; I was in my 20s before I realized that Easter wasn't about a bunny. I knew absolutely nothing about God or the Bible. All of this trickled upward into my adult life, and I had no faith whatsoever.

I had a very successful career in advertising. I started at the very bottom, but was eventually promoted to executive. I was able to buy a house and live fairly comfortably. My wife and I dreamed of moving to a small town in Oregon called Troutdale near the beautiful Sandy River. We'd both worked hard to be able to buy our own house there, and once we'd settled into our new home we were very happy.

I shrugged off God thinking there was plenty of time.

"Maybe later," I told myself. "If I accept God into my heart, my entire life as I know it has to stop. There'll be nothing to look forward to!"

These were the lies I told myself. I had a weakness for sin. Whenever my in-laws visited, they left copies of Christian literature for us to read. I was irritated by the fact that they did this. Not once did I ever read one, and they usually became convenient



Jeff Owenby with wife Terry and dog Sophie

question that Jesus had for His disciples in the boat was the question the pastor emphasized: "Why are you so afraid?"

From that day forward, I had an overwhelming desire to seek Christ. I turned away from booze, denial and sin and gave my heart to Jesus about two weeks later. As I put my faith in Jesus Christ, he blessed me with His gift of eternal life.

I never regretted a single minute of my Christian walk, but instead wonder why it took me so long to want to come to Him.

I am a living testimony to what Christ promises in His Holy Word. Thanks to God's infinite grace and mercy I've been clean and sober and smoke-free for 17 years. Miraculously, God also brought me

and my wife home to Troutdale.

Belief in Jesus Christ doesn't come because somebody talks us into it; true belief comes when we realize that He is real. This is the complete work of the Holy Spirit. If there's a shred of belief that some or part of this could be true, you're being called by the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus tells us in John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father except through me."

WHERE IS GOD IN THE MIDST OF TRAGEDY?

BY MARILYN ADAMSON

GOD is the Creator of the universe who yearns for us to know Him. That is why we are all here. It is His desire that we rely on and experience His strength, love, justice, holiness and compassion. So He says to all who are willing, "Come to Me."

Unlike us, God knows what will happen tomorrow, next week, next year, the next decade. He says, "I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning."

He knows what will occur in your life and can be there for you, if you've chosen to include Him in your life. He tells us that He can be "our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble."² But we must make a sincere effort to seek Him. He says, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."³

That doesn't mean that those who know God will escape difficult times. When wars or rampant disease cause suffering and death, those who know God will be involved in that suffering also.

But there is a peace and a strength that God's presence gives. Reality tells us that we will experience problems in life. However, if we go through them while knowing God, we can react to them with a different perspective and with a strength that is not our own. He is bigger than all the problems that can hit us, and we are not left alone to deal with them.

God has created humanity with the ability to choose. This means that we are not forced into a relationship with Him.

He allows us to reject Him and to commit other evil acts as well. He could force us to be loving. He could force us to be good. But then we would be robots. Instead He gave us the human dignity of free will.

We have, by our lives and actions, distanced ourselves from God. The Bible says that "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way."⁴

The consequences? Our sin has separated us from God, and it affects more than this life.

The penalty for our sin is death, or eternal separation from God.

However, God has provided a way for us to be forgiven and know Him.

God came to earth to rescue us. "For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."⁵

Jesus left the safety and security of His home, and entered the hard environment we live in.



STOCK PHOTO

• Turn to page 2

coasters for my beer cans.

Then one day the bottom fell out: My company closed its doors and I was not only out of a job, but out of a career. Because of this and other

future job failures, I finally ended up losing just about everything. I had other jobs, but couldn't manage to make anything work.

I've been an alcoholic since my early 20s and the drinking only got worse. Eventually we lost our house, and were forced to leave the city

we so loved. We were forced to move into a 300 square-foot studio apartment. That tiny studio was in a not-so-pleasant neighborhood where drugs were widespread, and break-ins happened quite often. At this point I'd entered into a depression that was almost overpowering.

One day, while visiting our in-laws, we went with them to church on a Sunday morning. While listening to a sermon on the book of Mark, the Holy Spirit struck my heart. I'd heard this preaching before; the message wasn't new to me at all, and I'd heard in other sermons about Jesus as He calmed a storm. The

“ I finally ended up losing just about everything. ”

YOUTH TRUTH Page 9

Fun for Kids Pages 5, 6, 7

BACK PAGE

NOT DEFINED BY THE WIN

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER

I FOUND THE WAY OF LOVE

Roy Chitwila was pursuing a woman when he heard the truth that transformed his life from uncertainty and hopelessness to peace, joy and love.

The 30-year-old Zambian business man tells *Challenge News* that he grew up with a single mother, who was always busy working to provide for him and his siblings.

As he grew up, feelings of hopelessness, fear and misery began to build within him. "I had some addictions like stealing and gluttony. I was rude, got into fights and was proud."

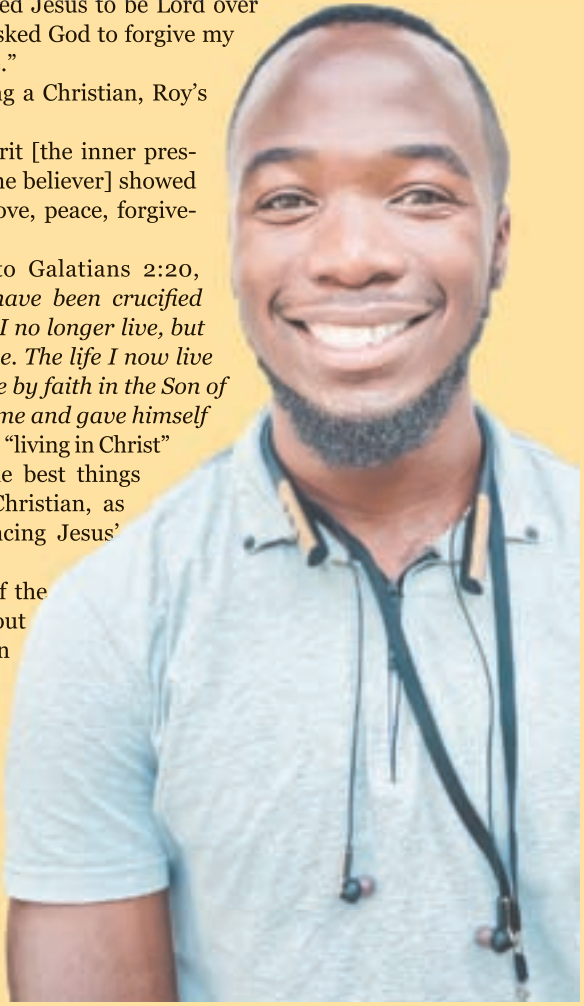
Everything changed when he met a woman and asked her out on a date. "She asked me if I could meet her at church," Roy recalls. "In pursuit of a lady I heard about Jesus. What led me to follow Christ is the love I experienced and peace when I was among Christians. I asked Jesus to be Lord over all my life and asked God to forgive my sins and save me."

Since becoming a Christian, Roy's life has changed.

"The Holy Spirit [the inner presence of God in the believer] showed me the way of love, peace, forgiveness and joy."

He referred to Galatians 2:20, which says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Roy says "living in Christ" is the one of the best things about being a Christian, as well as experiencing Jesus' peace and love.

He says one of the hardest parts about being a Christian is temptation to sin [wrongdoing against God] but he says, "Hope and strength come every time I pray."•



Roy Chitwila

My life is forever changed

BY BETTY WILKINS

Iwent from being an A-B honor roll student who played softball and basketball to a drop out in the 12th grade because of alcohol and drug use.

When I was 16, I took an overdose of pills to end my life and they had to pump my stomach to save me.

That was the first time God kept me from dying.

On January 26, 1996 I was hanging out with friends drinking.

One of my friends had a 22 pistol, and thought it wasn't loaded. He pointed it at me and pulled the trigger.

The bullet collapsed my right lung, grazed my heart, and went into the cavity of my spine hitting a nerve which paralyzed my right leg. I was air-lifted to a trauma hospital, given four pints of blood on the helicopter there and rushed into an eight-hour surgery to remove the bullet.

After surgery, I was given a medication that my body didn't react well to, and I was put on life support for seven days with only a 50/50 chance to live.

On the fifth day, doctors told my family there was nothing else they could do and placed me in God's hands. God saved me!

I spent three months in the hospital. Doctors told me I'd never have kids because of the internal bleeding and I'd never be able to walk again without some sort of assistance, due to my right leg being paralyzed.

However, within a year of being discharged from the hospital, I was walking normally, after only a couple of sessions of outpatient therapy.

During my stay in the hospital, a preacher came to visit me regularly.

I was saved [committed my life to Jesus] while in the hospital but backslid [relapsed into old ways] tremendously over the following years.

On September 26, 1996, six months to the day I got shot, I was on my way home from work and there was an ambulance racing up behind me as I pulled into my driveway.

They were going to a pond near my house. My 17-year-old brother had drowned. He was my best friend.

As I was walking out of my brother's funeral, I was sick to my stomach, throwing up. I assumed it was from my nerves from my brother's death.

However, despite what the doctor's had said, I was pregnant with my oldest son.

My son proved to be such a comfort to my family after losing my brother.

After my son was born, I secretly started drinking again, taking pills and doing drugs, just to be able cope with life. My grandad was an alcoholic and I think I may have inherited that from him.

Between age 21 and 33 I had two more boys, and only stopped drinking while I was pregnant but started again as soon as I had them. On the outside I looked like a happy person, on the inside I was empty and dead.

I had to take strong medication just to get out of bed every morning, and chased the pills down with alcohol. In July 2018, I was taken to jail for obtaining property by false pretence.



Betty Wilkins

I stole a man's credit card because I was angry with him. He took papers out on me. I went to jail for nine days under a \$30,000 bond. I was on supervised probation in two counties for a year, having to do community service at a food shelter.

During that time frame, I also got a DWI (driving while intoxicated) and spent a night in jail for that.

I went through many years of depression, unhappiness, loneliness, anger, hostility, endless relationships with men.

My three boys were the only thing that bought me joy.

On February 3, 2020 I chose to become sober.

I am now two years, 10 months and 24 days clean and sober.

On May 21, 2021, Mother's Day, I was baptized [a symbol of dying to your old life]. I gave my life to Jesus.

I am now a medication aide. I work at a senior care home taking care of five elderly ladies, and I hope to have my own care home soon.

In February 2023, I got married. I am free, my chains are broken. I will serve God every single day and live my life for Him.

I will spread His goodness and glory! He is my best friend. If anyone is struggling, and has not surrendered their life to God, please do it!

All my life leading up to the moment that I fully surrendered my life to God, I can look back and see His hand in everything I went through.

He was always keeping my head above water. He will never leave you, nor forsake you.

He will guide you and comfort you through every single thing in your life. My life is forever changed. •

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On the inside I was empty and dead.”

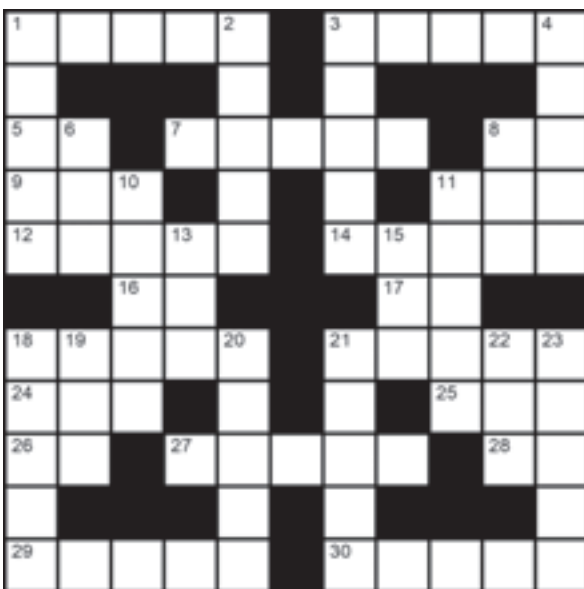
Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- Copycat
- Hang around, basically
- Passport etc
- Plain writing
- Down's opposite
- Took a load off
- Aka mad cow disease
- Fraud, robbery
- Back tooth
- ___, myself and I
- Date for she
- Tricked, fooled
- Change, as the Constitution
- Juvenile newt
- Golfer's goal
- A refusal
- Nobleman
- Or not to be?
- EU island state
- Role player

DOWN

- Like tearful eyes
- Diamond unit



- State in NE India
- Censor (out)
- Serious TV show
- Become narrower
- Service charge
- Oven smell
- Zip-a-Dee-Do-___
- Electrical unit
- Apprehend
- Stars and Stripes land
- Jeans material
- Gloomy
- Entice
- Weird blip on the radar

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SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



"How was your nap?"

Where is God in the midst of tragedy?

• From page 1

Jesus got tired, knew hunger and thirst, battled accusations from others and was ostracized by family and friends.

But Jesus experienced far more than daily hardships.

Jesus, the Son of God in human form, willingly took all of our sin on Himself and paid our penalty of death.

"In this is love, that he laid down his life for us." He went through torture, dying a slow, humiliating death of suffocation on a cross, so that we could be forgiven.

Jesus told others ahead of time that He would be crucified. He said three days after being buried He would show Himself physically alive to those who saw His crucifixion.

On that third day, Jesus' tomb was found empty and many people testified to seeing Him alive.

He now offers us eternal life. We don't earn

this. It is a gift from God offered to us, which we receive by faith when we ask Him to enter our lives. If we turn away from our sin and turn back to God, we can have the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

What about heaven? God does have a better place He offers us. In this world, God will wipe every tear from people's eyes.

There will be no more mourning, crying, death or pain. Right now you can ask God to enter your life.

You can do this through prayer. Prayer means talking honestly with God.

At this moment you can call out to God by telling Him something like this in sincerity: "God, I want to know You. I want to receive Jesus Christ and His forgiveness into my life. I don't want to be separated from

You anymore. Please forgive my sin. Be the God of my life from this day onward. Thank you God." •

Footnotes: (1) Isaiah 46:9 (2) Psalm 146:3 (3) Jeremiah 29:13 (4) Isaiah 53:6 (5) John 3:16-17 (6) 1 John 3:16 (7) Romans 6:23 (8) Revelation 21:4 This article was first published on EveryStudent.com and is used with kind permission

FROM CRIMINAL TO CRIMINOLOGIST

'S'hanghaied' from an open camp back to a maximum-security prison on a drug related charge, it was 1981 and my fifth Christmas since entering prison as a 22-year-old.

As I robotically paced the prison yard, I suddenly thought, "Have you found happiness in your life; real meaning and purpose?" That night in my tiny cell, I thought about hanging myself. Happiness? I needed to find a reason to live.

Raised on welfare in a Greek migrant family, I was a popular student, successful athlete, school captain and dux of my final year. My future looked promising. However, four years into an Arts/Law degree I grasped for fulfilment in a 'jet-set' lifestyle of drug addiction and armed-robberies. Despair, hatred and pornography further twisted me into someone I now feared.

Then I had another, much stranger thought: why not see what the Bible has to say?

What, the Bible? I resented Christians; they were boring and gullible and screwed me up when I was a kid. I rejected the thought, but it came back to me again and again until I asked myself, 'why am I so afraid of the Bible?' It's the most published and influential book in human history, and I've never read it. What have I got to lose?

I was unable to find a Bible in the library. However, that night, I flushed porn mags down the toilet, determined to find something decent to fill my perverted mind during the 17 hours locked up each day. The next day whilst sorting through my belongings in the prison's dungeon store-room, I discovered a New Testament.

In the sweltering heat of my cell, I began reading the gospel of Matthew. Six hours later, I sat still in the darkness, as I pondered the last words of Jesus that I had read: "Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you" (Luke 11:13). I began to cry uncontrollably from a place deep within that needed purging, and called out to Jesus through my grief for His forgiveness, cleansing and peace.

A grinding key in the cell door awoke me. An officer poked his head in. I blinked and said "Good morning sir," then thought, "What's wrong with me, calling a screw sir!" Yet I felt strangely different.

In the chilly morning air, Mad Mike stood sentinel-like in the middle of the yard wearing just a tee-shirt. I approached him, offering coffee and tobacco. Just then my friend Marwan approached. "Hey Arthur, what are you giving him your stuff for?" Staring at me now, he said "What's happened to you? Your eyes, your face is glowing."

Marwan looked around at others, then intently back at me.

"It's just you; only you've got it." He even got me to look into the latrine's dingy stainless steel 'mirror' to see what he could see. Amused at first, I realized that whatever it was I felt, and was somehow reflected in my face, was related to the previous night.

Discreetly pulling out the little book, and not quite knowing what to say, I said "Yesterday I was reading this." Marwan looked up from the New Testament, "What? Have you



Arthur and Andie Bolkas know that, underneath all the hurt and masks, prisoners are a lot like everyone else.

found God?" "God! No, no," I stammered, not yet appreciating that God had in fact found me.

That was 30 years ago. A lot has happened since including a failed marriage, relapse into drug addiction, gradual healing and restoration through surrender to Jesus Christ, and the blessing of my wife Andie and two sons. Demitri and Daniel

Some years later, I met my wife Andie while presenting an information session on volunteering to visit female prisoners.

Some years ago, we formed a prison ministry called Five8 ('my mate' in rhyming prison slang), that brings together volunteers to visit inmates and support them post

release. The first inmate we visited, Johnny, is now doing tertiary studies, is drug free and has become a Christian. Joanne is two years out, studying, and is not looking back. Frank successfully completed his first ever parole.

Both Andie and I know that when you scratch the surface of someone who is in prison, they are a lot like everyone else but have many more protective layers. Most people are in jail because they sustained broken hearts in their formative years and never fully recovered, often masking their pain with drugs and other addictions.

Arthur is a criminologist, speaker, actor and writer.

I AM NEVER ALONE

Eighteen-year-old Daniëlle Blom grew up in a Christian household and always tried to be the best person she could be. But although she kept trying, she kept failing and falling into issues like sexual immorality, jealousy and unforgiveness.

Daniëlle tells *Challenge News* that her journey with God started when she was 12, when her family went to a small group where Christians gathered for worship and prayer.

Daniëlle Blom



"I realized my sins," Daniëlle recalls. She asked God to forgive her but as time went on, she began to drift away from her faith.

Things changed in 2023 when she started a Christian gap year.

"I recommitted my heart and life," she shares. "I have now started a journey of purity with the Lord. He has taught me how to set boundaries and build meaningful relationships... He has given me a godly confidence to no longer feel afraid of what people will say or do against me. The best part of being a Christian is that I don't have to go through my life alone because God is with me. I realized that God's not just 'the man upstairs', but a Father I can build a relationship with. He has helped me through my fears, helped me through my dad's heart attack, gave me clarity with my worries about my future, and gave me strength when I had nothing left. God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are always with you."

Daniëlle's favourite Bible verse is Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." •



An awe-inspiring view!

A formula for life

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

THE living of life requires some thought. Our days rush past and they cannot be relived. Many, of course, start from disadvantage. I remember a 14-year-old, just out of a remand centre, who came to work with me. We were cleaning out a sheep dip – not my favourite job.

I was passing up buckets of foul sludge when I heard him mumble, "Do you know what my problem is?" I asked, "What is your problem?" He said, "I've got nothing to live for. I'm bored stiff and if there was a tablet which would end my life I'd take it." That's not how it should be! There's so much to live for, even in difficult circumstances.

In a shop once, I noticed the words on a plaque: "Live simply. Laugh often. Love much." Later I saw something similar: "Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly." That's good but we need to think deeper. Let me share a formula which will enrich us with meaning and purpose and help us in our day-to-day experience of living:

Live in awe

Be a 'wow person.' Marvel at wonders. Meditate on the spectacular. Think about the phenomenal. It's like a spiritual inhalant. Be like the poet Roger McKnight who wrote in his poem *Some Chordal Notes*: "In awe of everything, I sing and marvel more."

Wonders are everywhere and begging for us to be amazed. For me, the precision of a sunrise is breath-taking. Sometimes as daylight appears I say, "23 hours, 56 minutes and four seconds."

How phenomenal – every 23 hours, 56 minutes and four seconds, this enormous weight of matter spins like a giant top at 160kmph so precisely it's measured in thousandths of a second! What about its orbit of the sun? In a year Earth travels 940 million km and 365.24 days.

What about the air we inhale? It is just the right amount of oxygen and other elements – and with a thin layer of ozone guarding us from harmful rays. What about Earth's terrain – its mountains and plains, fiords and glaciers, rivers, oceans and lakes? The more we travel the more we have to think we live on Planet Spectacular.

I listen a lot to the birds. I love the notes of the wattle jacks, the soft whistle of the thrush and the laugh of the kookaburra.

What beauty we see in the flowers and plants – the wonder of bees and the taste of honey! What about the oceans and islands and all the myriads of fish and sea creatures. We live in a world of miracles and wonders. While we can marvel at all these phenomenal things, we need to realize that once it wasn't there. Science and the Bible tell us that at one time it didn't exist. Today it does! The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 5:7, "Therefore stand in awe of God!"

Live in appreciation

Thankful people are happy people. It can be hard when things are against us, but look for something to be grateful for.

Thank God for the gift of life. I thank Him a lot for my eyes. What a spectacular faculty is sight. I grew up near a boy who was born with little sight which gradually left him. It made me appreciate my vision.

But he was always cheerful and happy, and grateful for the lovely dog which led him wherever he wanted to go. He even travelled overseas with the aid of his labrador. The Bible says in Psalm 92:1, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." Yes, it's a very good thing and also to thank others for all they do and mean to us. Perhaps the best way to express gratitude is sharing and giving. As Jesus once said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 9:15: "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" How we need to thank God for Jesus our Savior – God's great gift to the world.

Live in anticipation

Looking forward to good things puts spark into living. It may be a holiday, a special celebration, the birth of a baby, the footy finals or a visit from friends or even getting out of the hospital.

Anticipate good things in each day. Be optimistic about what might happen. Be expectant! Anticipation, however, needs extensions. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

I've attended funerals which disappoint. They refer to a life lived and what has been achieved with no hint of hope. One day a 98-year-old, just one day before he died, lustily sang the hymn *How Great Thou Art*. What wonderful words of anticipation did he sing in the last verse:

"When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation, and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart. Then I shall bow, in humble adoration, And then proclaim: 'My God, how great Thou art!'"

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:9: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Jesus conquered death and through His resurrection is able to assure believers of eternal life beyond the grave.

Adding anticipation to awe and appreciation is a great way to live. •

“
Thankful people are happy people.
”

Tass and
Karen
Saada

SNIPER FINDS PEACE WITH JEWES

Pledging his allegiance to the Arafat forces as a young Palestinian sniper, Taysir Abu Saada never expected to overcome his bitter hatred towards Jews while working in America.

Taysir, better known as Tass, was so engrained with hatred and anger as a youngster that he once tried to shoot one of his teachers.

"He went down and I thought I had hit him so I got in my car and drove off, but thank God he was not," he says looking back.

After the incident Tass was kicked out of school and his father gave him a choice to leave Saudi Arabia and go study elsewhere. He chose America.

"Why did I want to go to America when I hated the Americans just as much as I hated the Jews?" he asks. "It was an amazing thing to me. I was so drawn. When I got to America

and I lived there for a few months I realized that the Americans are very good-hearted people."

Tass started working as a dish washer in a French restaurant and after befriending the owners, he moved out front as a waiter serving tables.

On his first day in the dining room he remembers feeling extremely nervous when serving his first customer, a multi-billionaire named Charlie Sharpe.

"He stopped talking to the lady with him and looked at me with a beautiful smile and said, 'Thank you, young man'," he recalls.

"That intrigued me as a person from the Middle East; when you are really that wealthy you don't look at the little people at all, you don't treat them right."

Noticing an unexplainable peace and love in his manner, Tass decided he would "take good care of this man" and they developed a deep friendship.

Choosing to be trained in hotel management, Tass ultimately became a highly successful executive.

After 19 years in America, Tass wanted to buy the restaurant he started in, but his plan to move it to a former funeral home hit a hurdle.

"From my Moslem background and teaching, any place that had dead bodies has demons and ghosts in the building, so when I walked in there I was uncomfortable," he recalls.

Relating this creepy feeling to Charlie, Tass was shocked when Charlie said "you have no fear of God", then added that this is easily fixed saying, "I have connections".

He tried to laugh Charlie's suggestion off, but the meaning of Charlie's connection so troubled him that he could not eat or sleep normally.

Within days he felt like a walking zombie and was smoking six packets of cigarettes a day trying to calm his nerves, so at their next dinner meeting Tass begged Charlie to explain his "connection".

The following day Charlie told Tass about the miracles he had experienced in his life. Then Tass froze

when Charlie said that to have peace he must love the Jews.

"He knew how much I hated the Jews," Tass explains.

"To me at that time a good Jew was a dead Jew."

He became indignant when Charlie tried to explain that Jesus Christ was not just a prophet, as Muslims believed, but that the Bible taught that He was actually God, the Messiah who had been prophesied about throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. As he stormed towards the door Charlie called him back, begging him for a chance to explain as he reached for his Bible.

"He put his Bible right in between the two of us and when he did that I jumped away from it," Tass says.

When asked why he felt so repelled by the book, Tass admitted that he knew it was because it had the name of God and the word of God in it.

Despite this, he did not know what the Bible actually had to say about Jesus and as Charlie started reading from the first chapter of John he was overwhelmed.

"When he started reading that Jesus is the Word, Jesus is God, I started shaking and I lost control," Tass recalls.

"The next thing I know, I'm on my knees on the floor with my hands lifted up, inviting Christ to be my Lord and Savior.

"I felt like a mountain lifted off my shoulders and a joy and peace came into my heart I never experienced before."

Although neither of the men could explain what had just happened, they both knew that by surrendering his life to Jesus Christ on that day, Tass now had peace and an eternal connection with God.

The next day he felt a strange burden to pray for a special blessing over the Jewish race he had once despised. Shocked by the sudden love that had engulfed his complete hatred, Tass knew that the power of Jesus Christ was the only thing that could have changed his heart.

Following his radical conversion Tass established a kindergarten work in Jericho and founded Seeds of Hope, an organisation committed to bring change to families through education, economic development, cultural exchange and humanitarian aid, where he continues to share the unexplainable love he has for all races of people through Jesus Christ.

Hard road, soft heart

The fact that Cindy Marais is alive today is a miracle. Her mother attempted to abort her – twice – and since her traumatic birth she has faced abuse, trauma and grief almost every step of the way. But there has been a shining light with her since she was a teenager, giving her the strength to continue with when life seemed hopeless.

Three days after she was born, Cindy's parents left her and her older sister with a couple that they thought were their grandparents. She describes it as a "godly home with love, abundance and education."

Cindy explains, "This was a normal, fantastic childhood, until I found out at age 10 that I was not family. This devastated me and the rejection was so bad that I decided to live with my mom and step dad... My world changed into an absolute nightmare. In this home I experienced drugs, alcohol, deception, adultery and poverty."

Cindy helped look after her siblings and learned to run the household while their mother was at the pub or smoking dagga or using narcotics and alcohol.

"This led to endless adulterous affairs, all while my stepfather was sexually molesting us. We moved from place to place – one year we were in three different schools and three different provinces. This obviously created a huge impact on my school career."

School was the last thing on her Cindy's mind with so much going on at home and she left in standard 7 (grade 9).

At 14 Cindy was raped by a man who supplied her mother with drugs. Petrified, she kept the assault a secret. A turning point came soon after however when a friend invited her to a Scripture Union meeting. She had heard about God from the couple who had raised her but it wasn't until this meeting that she realized her need for a Savior – Jesus – and gave her life to Him.

"I threw myself into the church, and felt accepted and loved," Cindy remembers.

Before long Cindy's mother and stepfather forbade her from going to church. She recalls her mother beating her and giving her 'medicine' from witchdoctors, but throughout it all she clung to hope in her faith.

"All I had hidden deep in my heart was Jesus. I was all alone in a world where I was so different in every way."

Cindy experienced multiple assaults by multiple men. "I was haunted by this fear of men and started just giving in to them. I knew a guy that had been pursuing me for



Cindy Marais

some time who was separated from his wife, but still married. He offered me his home and fell in love with me. For me this was a way out and I grabbed it. I then fell pregnant at the age of 18 and had a beautiful baby girl. But life changed and he started flirting with and running after other women. He loved to party and stopped working, leaving me to go back to work while he took care of our baby girl. We had to move into a garage, with no toilet or running water."

Cindy longed to give her daughter a better life than she had had so she decided to leave her daughter's father and returned home.

After Cindy's mother stole her belongings and left for a new life in a new town, Cindy moved in with a friend and started a new life in Port

Edward.

"I started devoting my life to God and was on fire for my Messiah. I met my husband – a man of honour, integrity and compassion, who taught me how to live and be a part of a family. He knew about my past but loved me and made me the queen of his life. God gave me a home, furniture and finally my own bed to lay my head on."

But tragedy struck again when after finally falling pregnant, their son, David, was stillborn at 39 weeks. The grief only compounded the rejection Cindy had experienced from before she was born.

"I then started focusing a bit on Cindy by God's grace and started a career. So, at age 40 I decided to do my NQF4 and do my matric... which I passed with three distinctions!"

In 2018, Cindy opened a restaurant and ran it successfully for five years.

"But when Covid19 hit the world, this took my precious husband. I was too young to be a widow but I knew God had a plan. I said, 'Lord, you cannot give me all these tears, and not have a greater plan for my life.'"

Last year Cindy gave up her business and began volunteering at child welfare. She also plans to launch an online ministry helping people deal with mental

health issues, abuse and grief in the hopes that God will use her pain to help other people.

"I have forgiven my parents and only tell this story to bring honour to God," she says.

Looking back at her difficult life now, Cindy remains positive: "I always felt God had a plan for my life, and even though I felt abandoned, I knew God was with me. He was most certainly my strength and hope of a better life."

“Even though I felt abandoned, I knew God was with me.”

Twentieth-century martyrs Felipe and Mary Barrera wrote, "We discovered that faith is not expecting that the Lord will miraculously give us whatever we ask, or feeling the security that we will not be killed and that everything will turn out as we want. We learned that faith is putting ourselves in His hands, whatever happens, good or bad. He will help us somehow."

GENESIS AND THE ICE AGE

Carl Wieland of Creation Ministries International interview with weather scientist Michael Oard

BY CARL WIELAND
(ABRIDGED
AND EDITED)

Michael “Mike” J Oard has a Masters Science degree in Atmospheric Science from the University of Washington. He works as a meteorologist/weather forecaster for the (US) National Weather Service, and has published several papers in his field in widely recognised journals.

Mike is from Montana, a beautiful place associated with rugged backwoodsmen and scenic wilderness.

It is also a place where one can see a lot of evidence that large chunks of the world were once covered by huge glacial sheets.

For example, Mike points out there are huge boulders which show signs of having been transported a long way from their original location.

He says this was either from being carried by an ice sheet, or dropped from an iceberg floating in one of the many lakes which were abundant near the ice sheet.

Although he does a lot of thinking and part-time research into other aspects of creationism, particularly in regard to the global flood, Mike (who has written quite a number of articles for CMI’s *Journal of Creation*) is best known for his work on the biblical Ice Age.

He has written a technical monograph on the subject, as well as *Life in the Great Ice Age*, a family book co-authored with his wife Beverly. This book really makes the subject ‘come alive’ with its clever use of illustrated fiction, as Neanderthals and other post-flood groups of humans interact with the harsh climate conditions.

Raised in a liberal church, Mike was taught that there were errors in the Bible.

However, when he read it for himself, it seemed reasonable. In spite of getting a lot of religious education, it wasn’t until a stint in the Navy that he thought seriously about “whether



ABOVE: Weather scientist Dr Michael Oard.
INSET: One of the many books Michael has published about Creation.



God existed and, if He existed, that’s all that mattered.”

“I became a Christian at 18 years old when I realized that the world is much too complex to have come about by chance,” he tells *Challenge News*.

“That told me that God exists, but it was up to me to discover more. That eventually led me to read and trust the Bible. I have since found that Genesis chapters 1-11 is consistent with what I see on the earth, especially the abundant evidence for the flood and the post-flood rapid Ice Age.”

He believes that six-day creation is really important, because he says, “if you start compromising that which seems to me very obvious in Scripture, you’re opening yourself up to compromise in many other areas of the Bible, and that’s what I think a lot of people do.”

Mike says he first began to think seriously about the mechanism for an Ice Age about 20 years ago.

The important thing for any Ice Age theory, he says, is to find a way “to cool the summers, to stop ice from melting – in most areas that were once glaciated, the winters are already cold enough.”

One such cooling mechanism was readily available after the flood, with

much volcanic ash and gases still in the air from the breaking up of the crust, which also liberated the “fountains of the great deep” described in Genesis.

Such volcanic matter in the air would reflect much of the sun’s heat back out to space.

However, just having cooler air is not enough. Mike points out that in Siberia today, there are very low temperatures, but it is so cold that there is not enough moisture in the air to maintain an ice sheet.

To have an ice age, he says, you need a way to get lots of water out of the ocean up on to the land.

Evolutionists, says Mike, have a favored astronomical theory for the Ice Age which gives them a little cooling, but no way to get more moisture into the air (a colder world means less evaporation from the oceans).

However, “after the flood you would have both,” says Mike.

“The water that the Bible indicates came from under the ground during the flood would have been very warm or hot. This water mixing with the pre-flood ocean would result in a significantly warmer ocean, right after the flood, than today.

“Warmer water means more evaporation. So you have more moisture in the air available for storms, generating snow and ice at middle and upper latitudes, close to the developing ice sheets. And the ash and gases in the air is what gives the cooling of the summers.”

All this would have been like a loaded gun at the end of the flood.

“There would have been no way to delay it, an ice age just had to start.”

Mike’s calculations show that a likely estimate for when the Ice Age reached its maximum would have been around 500 years after the flood, with about another 200 years to melt. He warns that this is only a ‘ballpark’ figure, which could vary by hundreds of years – “but that’s still a short time for evolutionists.”

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An example of an ‘Erratic’ boulder at Yellowstone National Park (moved from its original location by ice). Photo: Public Domain



Dolphin sonar far better than man’s

BY JONATHAN SARFATI, CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

WE have long known about the exquisite echolocation technology of both bats and dolphins that uses sound to calculate the distance and speed of objects. Now Dr Josefin Starkhammar, of the Department of Biomedical Engineering at Lund University, Sweden, has studied what makes dolphins so “phenomenally good” at echolocation.¹

Dolphins generate their sound beam with phonic lips below the blowhole. The main discovery was that the dolphin’s double sonar comprises “two intertwined beam components”, one low pitched and the other higher pitched, producing a beam with overlapping pulses.^{2,3} And the beam has a frequency gradient from bottom (low pitched) to top (higher pitched). This means prey can be located more accurately in the beam: the higher the pitch of the prey’s echo, the higher the prey is physically located in the sound beam.

Low-frequency sounds can spread further under water, while high-pitch sounds can provide more information about the object’s shape. Dr Starkhammar hopes that analysing dolphin echolocation will help build better ultrasound scanners, improving resolution of scans of thin layers in the body.⁴

Dr Starkhammar attributes the dolphins’ incredible echolocation abilities to “millions of years of evolution.”¹ I would argue that one problem with explaining echolocation with evolution is that dolphins and bats both have complex echolocation systems. And they are each built by about 200 genes that are incredibly similar in both species. However, they have no common echolocating ancestor in evolutionary theory. So evolutionists, including Dr Starkhammar,⁵ argue that this is a case of convergent evolution. That is, similar environments (in this case, poor visibility and complex surroundings) produce similar selection pressures that drive similar solutions to the navigation problem. However, the fossil record doesn’t document evolution of either dolphin or bat sonars. One evolutionary article admitted, “the ancestors of today’s dolphins had an ear structure that suggests they could echolocate as well as their modern relatives can,” and that the “oldest bat fossils had extensive coiling of bony structures in the inner ears; a sign that they were capable of detecting the high-frequency chirps used in echolocation.”⁶

A better explanation would incorporate the principle of analogy – to which Darwin himself appealed frequently. That is, since the man-made sonars are the result of intelligence, how much more are the vastly superior dolphin sonars?

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Youth Truth

CASSIE'S TRANSFORMATION

Cassie Bernall took a bold stand for her faith before a school shooting cut her young life short

For 17-year-old Cassie Bernall, April 20, 1999 started off like any other school day. She laced up her beloved Doc Marten boots, said goodbye to her family and walked the 100 yards to her high school in Columbine, Colorado. But by the end of that morning, Cassie was dead, gunned down by a fellow student and the date would become infamous around the world.

Cassie was raised in a Christian home by her parents Brad and Misty but she rebelled against their values and rules as a young teenager when she started hanging out with a girl called Mona (not her real name).

When Cassie was about 14, Misty and Brad discovered letters to Cassie from Mona that shocked them. The letters were about the teens murdering Cassie's parents along with graphic illustrations of how they would do it. They also talked about killing a teacher, witchcraft, using drugs and suicide.

When Misty and Brad confronted Cassie about it, she told them none of it was serious and they didn't mean anything.

But she was angry at their invasion of her privacy and threatened to run away or kill herself.

They contacted the police and their church pastor and pulled Cassie out of the school she was attending. She was grounded, forbidden from seeing Mona and was only allowed to attend church youth group.

In an essay that Cassie later wrote, she admitted, "Throughout this time, I hated my parents and God with the deepest, darkest hatred. There are no words to describe the blackness I felt."

Misty writes in her book, *She Said Yes*, that she prayed for God's protection over Cassie and her friends.

"If there was anything I felt certain of at that moment, it was that we were dealing with more than a bunch of rebellious teenagers... I felt that we were engaged in a spiritual battle."

A turning point came when Cassie made friends with Jamie at her new private Christian school. Jamie remembers Cassie as bitter and hopeless when she first met her. "She told me that she had given her soul to Satan through one of her friends," Jamie says.

Jamie, who was a Christian,



Cassie's parents Misty and Brad Bernall pose with a portrait of their daughter by Vermont artist Livy Hitchcock. (Photo By Craig F. Walker/The Denver Post via Getty Images)

ers about her newfound faith and begged her parents to let her move to a public school where she could reach more people.

Misty and Brad agreed, on the condition that if she started to hang out with the wrong crowd or her grades slipped, she would transfer back to her old school.

In 1997, Cassie began her sophomore year at Columbine High School.

Two years later, she was among 12 students and one teacher who were tragically killed by senior students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who then killed themselves. Eric and Dylan were reported to have questioned some students about their beliefs in God before shooting them.

There are conflicting reports on what happened in Cassie's final moments.

One of Cassie's classmates recalls: "I couldn't see anything when those guys came up to Cassie, but I could recognise her voice. I could hear everything like it was

right next to me. One of them asked her if she believed in God.

"She paused, like she didn't know what she was going to answer, and then she said yes. She must have been scared but her voice didn't sound shaky. It was strong.

"Then they asked her why, though they didn't give her a chance to respond. They just blew her away." Another said Cassie was hiding under a table and Eric Harris shouted "Peek-a-boo!" before shooting her.

Brad heard the gunshots at the school from their home.

When they couldn't find Cassie, they hoped she had taken shelter safely in the school somewhere. But they were informed Cassie had died two days later.

Four witnesses later told them Cassie had defended her faith before being killed.

After her death, Misty and Brad discovered a note Cassie had written in 1998, which said, "I try to stand up for my faith at school... It can be discouraging, but it can also be rewarding... I will die for my God. I will die for my faith. It's the least I can do for Christ dying for me."

And the day Cassie died, she handed her friend Amanda a note. An excerpt reads: "Honestly, I want to live completely for God. It's hard and scary, but totally worth it."

Twenty-three years on, Cassie's brave stand continues to inspire people around the globe to take their faith seriously, despite the cost.

Following their daughter's death, Brad and Misty found comfort in seeking God and said He gave them strength to bear their loss.

They now speak publicly and carry Cassie's message throughout the world.

When your dreams shatter

BY BEN LAHOOD

Lacy Brunson was able to access the internet and porn in many places growing up, even through his PlayStation Portable (PSP). He was raised by his grandparents, who saved him from the distressing chaos of his parents' life: his mum was an alcoholic and drug addict. His dad came in and out of his life constantly.

"I'm grateful that my grandparents raised me because they took me out of what could have been an even worse situation," Lacy says in a video on his YouTube channel Lacy B.

"They raised me the right way. I was raised in church. I knew about God; I knew about Jesus. But I didn't want that. I didn't want anything to do with that because I saw the hypocrisy.

"I saw the pastors that were sleeping around with members of the church or in the same clubs that I went to. I saw people in leadership drinking."

Lacy's troubles arose in middle school when kids showed him pictures of pornography.

At that time, the internet was just starting, and with it came free and easy access to lustful images. His PSP became just one more device to let sewage into his brain.

"There I was in my room secretly looking at porno and downloading it to my PSP and eventually my cell phone," he remembers. "My mind became so warped when it came to this issue because all I now saw was women as sex objects. I didn't even care."

Early on, he Lacy began sleeping around. "I had my first kid even before I left high school," he says.

Soon he added weed, alcohol and parties to the mix.

"I was never satisfied," he recognises. "They were only momentary pleasures, but I kept doing them. It was a habit." With admirable basketball skills, Lacy contemplated a college basketball scholarship.

After the walk-on tryout for the university team, the coach called him to the office. "He told me how impressed he was."

But Lacy didn't lay off the drugs. "I was going to class high. I wasn't doing any of my homework. I wasn't studying," he explains. "I was partying on

Tuesdays. It was crazy. I was reckless in college."

When the coach saw his grades, he realized Lacy was academically disqualified to join the team.

"That was an extreme breaking point for me," Lacy says. "I felt like I lost everything."

Eventually, Lacy he was also kicked out of college because of his grades.

He returned home to a listless life.

"What's the point?" he asked himself when he realized his dreams had evaporated. "I went extra hard with weed, parties, girls. I didn't care about life anymore."

Finally, a local pastor invited him to church. He attended several services until finally he cried out to God.

"If You're real like I've been hearing about all my life, I need You. I need Your help," he prayed in his seat. "I'm tired of life. I don't want to do this anymore."

The fact that he could come back to God after being turned off by bad examples of other church goers was significant.

"At 21 years of age, kicked out of school, at the lowest point in my life, I said, 'God, I'm here. If You are real, please make Yourself real to me because I'm tired, I'm lost, I need help.'"

Lacy responded to the altar call and prayed to receive Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

"Something powerful happened in me that moment. I

remember weeping like a baby. I could feel this cleansing. I could feel this weight being lifted off of my chest," he recalls.

"It felt like somebody was power-washing me on the inside. When I opened my eyes, I felt like I was in a new place. I felt love."

In place of his shame and guilt, joy and peace flooded his heart.

"I felt forgiven."

Lacy determined to live for God and stay consistent in church attendance. Since straightening up his life, Lacy now has a wife and children and is a pastor and musician.

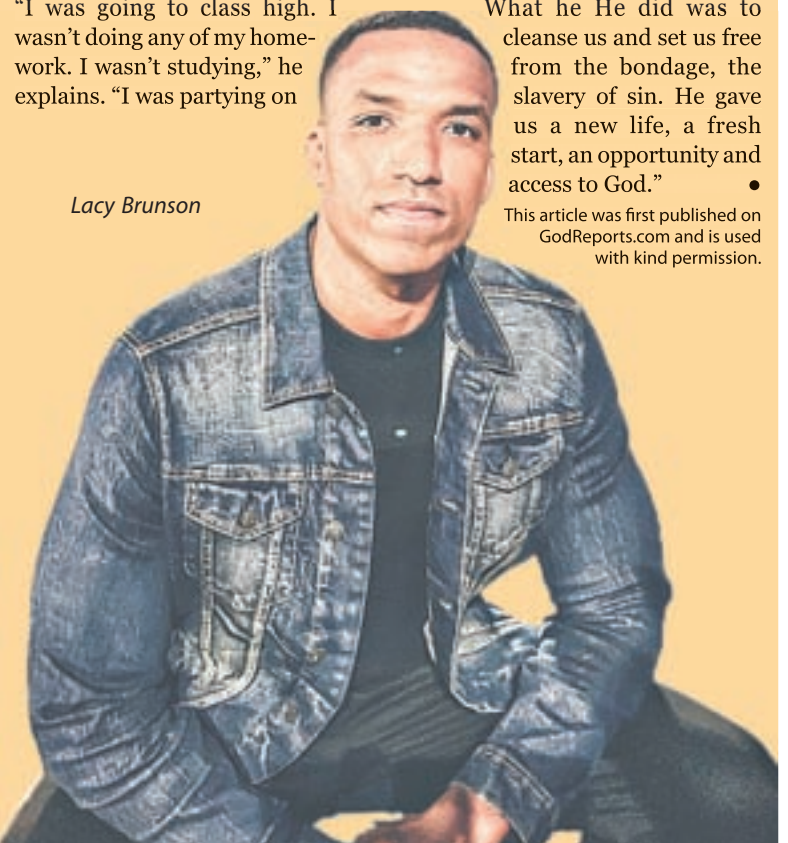
"God's been using my life," he says.

"What Jesus did on that cross wasn't just for us to go to church. What he He did was to

cleanse us and set us free from the bondage, the slavery of sin. He gave us a new life, a fresh start, an opportunity and access to God."

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

“ I could feel this weight being lifted off my chest. ”



Lacy Brunson

Contact Challenge!

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

Cherry pie bars

THESE thick, chewy bars are the midpoint between a blondie and a cherry pie. They can be easily made with fresh or frozen cherries. If using frozen cherries, be sure to thaw the cherries and drain excess liquid to prevent the bars from being gloopy.

Prep: 30 min Cook: 1 hour 15 min
Total: 1 hour 45 min Yields 32 bars

32oz cherries

If using fresh cherries, rinse and pit cherries. If using frozen cherries, thaw them and drain excess liquid. Set aside.

Crust and topping

1 tablespoon butter

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13 inch baking pan and line with parchment paper so that the paper hangs over the sides of the pan.

3 cups all-purpose flour

1 ½ cup sugar

¼ teaspoon fine sea salt

In a large bowl, combine flour, sugar, and sea salt with an electric hand mixer on low until well blended.

1 ½ cups butter (3 sticks), cut into cubes

With mixer running on low speed, add butter a few cubes at a time, blending as you go. Increase speed to high once added and blend until the mixture is crumbly and no larger than peas.

Using a measuring cup, reserve 1 ½ cups of the mixture and place in the fridge to use as a crumb topping later.

Take remaining mixture and spread in prepared pan, pressing down with a spatula to form an even, firm crust.

Bake at 350°F until light golden brown, about 12 to 15 minutes. Remove baking sheet from oven and let crust cool before adding fruit topping.

Cherry filling

2 cups sugar

¾ cup all-purpose flour

Pinch of fine sea salt

While the crust bakes, in a large bowl, whisk together sugar, flour, and sea salt.

4 large eggs

1 cup sour cream

Add eggs and sour cream, whisking until smooth.

Reserved cherries

Add reserved cherries and gently fold into mixture.

Once crust has baked and cooled, pour filling on top of crust and spread out.

Reserved crumb topping

Remove reserved crumb topping from fridge and evenly sprinkle over cherry filling. Bake at 350°F until top is golden brown and fruit mixture is bubbling, about 50 to 55 minutes.

Remove from oven and let cool completely before removing from pan and cutting into bars, about 3 hours. Leftover bars will keep in an airtight container in the refrigerator for 3 days.

Recipe and photo from MakeBetterFood.com



JESSE'S ACT OF FAITH

His name may not be a household one but his face is probably familiar; with 92 acting credits most people are sure to have seen Jesse Hutch gracing their screens. And then there's the 16 credits for stunt roles, four for directing, three for writing, three for producing and even a soundtrack credit.

The 43-year-old Canadian has been busy since his career began in 2001, but he has been selective about the roles he chooses and his strong faith has even cost him some jobs.

He told Christian Headlines he had been given a role as a secondary character in a major Hollywood series when the filmmakers offered him a major role that would have required a bedroom



scene with the female lead. Jesse declined the major role but lost the secondary role, too.

"Because I didn't take that [major] role, the next day, they rescinded [the secondary] role," Jesse shares. "People can get offended sometimes if you stand your ground, and that's okay. I can't live in that. I have to live in the fact that, hey, God put conviction on my heart. I gotta follow that."

Jesse became a Christian as a young child. "I asked the Lord in my heart when I was five years old, in my bedroom," he recalls in a Men's Leadership Network podcast episode. "I had one of those old-school beds with the four posts. And my grandmother got down and prayed with me... I still have the Bible she gave me when I was five."

Despite his young age, Jesse remembers feeling different after praying and giving his life to Jesus.

"It really felt like there was a peace upon me that I never could articulate at five years old, six years old, seven years old."

When Jesse was 11, his parents divorced. It was a painful time, but he recalls feeling "the hand of God" on him.

He had the same feeling when he had a near-death experience when he was 21. "I drowned when I was 21 years old," he tells CBN

Digital. "I should be completely, honestly dead. I shouldn't have lived, and, if I did, I shouldn't be able to speak, I shouldn't be able to hear, I shouldn't be able to talk."

While working as a white-water raft guide, Jesse was trapped underwater for between 11 and 22 minutes. He says someone found him underwater and took him to a hospital, where he was put in a pressure chamber.

"It is an absolute miracle," he attests. "[In] weeks... I was fine. My eardrums didn't completely explode; they should have."

He now says God protected him in that situation, and many other experiences he has been through.

As he reflects on his life, he says he can see that God has guided him. And, despite a busy schedule, Jesse and his family choose to follow that guidance.

"There's not a lot of good leaders out there," he says in a See Hear Love podcast episode, "and that's just the fact and so, who am I gonna follow? You have to answer that question, and for me I follow Scripture, I follow the Word of God, I follow Jesus Christ."

Jesse's television credits include *Dark Angel*, *Kyle XY*, *Smallville*, *Arrow*, *Almost Human*, *Supernatural*, *Batwoman* and *Project Blue Book*. More recently Jesse has focused on romantic comedies for Hallmark and Great American Family.

Jesse Hutch attends Christmas Con New Jersey 2022 at Expo Center on December 10, 2022 in Edison, New Jersey. (Photo by Emily Assiran/Getty Images for That's 4 Entertainment)



Book review: *These Silent Woods*

These Silent Woods by Kimi Cunningham Grant

BY HARRIET COOMBE

BOOK summary: A father and daughter living in the remote Appalachian Mountains must reckon with the ghosts of their past in Kimi Cunningham Grant's *These Silent Woods*, a mesmerising novel of suspense.

No electricity, no family, no connection to the outside world.

For eight years, Cooper and his young daughter, Finch, have lived in isolation in a remote cabin in the northern Appalachian woods. And that's exactly the way Cooper wants it, because he's got a lot to hide. Finch has been raised on the books filling the cabin's shelves and the beautiful but brutal code of life in the wilderness. But she's starting to push back against the sheltered life Cooper has created for her—and he's still haunted by the painful truth of what it took to get them there.

The only people who know they exist are Scotland, an overly friendly hermit with murky intentions, and Cooper's old friend, Jake, who visits each winter to bring them food and supplies. But this year, Jake doesn't show up, setting

off an irreversible chain of events that reveals just how precarious their situation really is. Suddenly, the boundaries of their safe haven have blurred—and when a stranger wanders into their woods, Finch's growing obsession with her could put them all in danger.



When a shocking disappearance threatens to upend the only life Finch has ever known, Cooper is forced to decide whether to keep hiding—or finally face the sins of his past. Vividly atmospheric and masterfully tense, *These Silent Woods* is a poignant

story of survival, sacrifice, and how far a father will go when faced with losing it all.

My thoughts: Five stars. *These Silent Woods* was full of surprises for

me. I bought it on a friend's recommendation but it sat on my shelf for a while and when I eventually got to it, I couldn't remember who had recommended it to me or why.

Billed as a thriller with an atmospheric front cover, I liked the idea of a father and

daughter survival novel. As I read though, it didn't really seem like your typical thriller. I'm used to exciting, fast-paced thrillers but this is more of a slow-burn, gently compelling you to keep reading and discover the truth about the secrets Cooper is keeping.

I really enjoyed getting to know all the characters— who were all refreshingly real—and found myself constantly questioning their motives.

These Silent Woods doesn't shy away from deeper issues like grief and military PTSD and at times some of the chapters were hard for me to read.

My favorite things about this book were the surprise twist ending and the overarching themes of sacrifice and grace which are weaved throughout the novel.

Grace can be a complicated concept and hard to define. We often heard about God's grace, which can be defined as His unmerited or undeserved favour. I like how the author writes in *These Silent Woods*, "The thing about grace is that you don't deserve it. You can't earn it. You can only accept it. Or not."

The ultimate act of grace took place when God gave His Son, Jesus to die for our sins on the cross, giving us eternal life. His sacrifice means when we put our trust in Jesus we will inherit eternal life—something we can neither earn nor deserve. **If you would like to do this, please see the box entitled *How do I become a Christian?* on page 11.**

The choice is yours – choose love!

BY JAMES BURNS

"**ALL THE** world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Many people will know William Shakespeare wrote those words, but did you know that they were spoken by Jacques in *As You Like It*?

In the Netflix film *Choose Love*, it's the viewer who can decide the ending. And it's not just one decision towards the end of the film, but a series of decisions throughout the film that you are invited to make that will determine what happens to the characters. And if you decide not to answer, the choice is made for you.

So just like real life, not making a decision actually is the decision, which leads to planned or unintended consequences.

For some people, their idea of God is that if they choose to become a Christian, they will no longer be free to make their own choices in life. That they will be handing control over to Him, with no say in how their life progresses. That He will take over their life like a puppet master.

But that's the exact opposite of what God wants from us. He could have made humans pre-programmed to love Him—robots living in a world without trouble. Instead, God left the



Choose Love is available to stream on Netflix.

decision to us, hoping that we would choose to love Him of our own free will, because we don't get genuine love from someone by forcing them to love us.

How good it is to know that it was God who made the first move: "We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) It has been said that each one of us has been put on this earth for a purpose. If you're not following the path you know you ought to take, it's not too late to change direction. But how tragic it would be to have to admit to the words of John Greenleaf Whittier, "For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: 'It might have been!'"

Choose love? Choose God's love!

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

Building better relationships

How are you investing your life?

BY ROB FURLONG

JUST this past week I read an article based on data provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics which revealed that people born between 2019 and 2021 will likely live an average 30 years longer than those who were born between 1891 and 1900.

The figures also showed that Australians are living to an average age of 84.3 years, and we are ranked third best in the world for overall life expectancy.

Centuries ago, Moses declared, "Seventy years are given to us! Some even live to 80... soon they disappear, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:10)

So, taking 80 as an average life span for people, if you're aged 40 now, then you have 14,600 days to live!

It doesn't sound like a lot when it's put that way does it? The reason I am mentioning this is because it's a strong reminder that life goes by very, very quickly and given this truth, we need to consider thoughtfully and carefully what we are going to invest into these precious days of our lives.

For me, one is relationships and to be specific, relationships with my immediate family.

This is not a new commitment for me. From the outset of our marriage, Karen and I committed ourselves

to living by God's principles, and when we sought to start a family, we were both determined to raise our children in God's ways, be open with them about our faith and our own struggles, always being prepared to talk with them about spiritual things, and to do our best to model to them what it looks like for two people to love each other and work through their stuff.

Around 1997 I read a book called *Anchor Man* which only strengthened my commitment to the aims mentioned above.

The author's basic premise was that it is a husband's/ father's responsibility to anchor his family in Christ through the life and faith he lives out and teaches to them.

His challenge to men was to take up this responsibility and anchor their family in Christ for the next 100 years.

He also pointed out that those who came from non-Christian families had broken with the chains of their past and had now become the first link in a new chain that was being forged – this time in Jesus.

I had been trying to anchor our family in Christ for some years by then, but the new and encouraging thought to me was that I could see that God had broken the chains of my past and I was now forging a new one in our family history! I have not regretted the decision

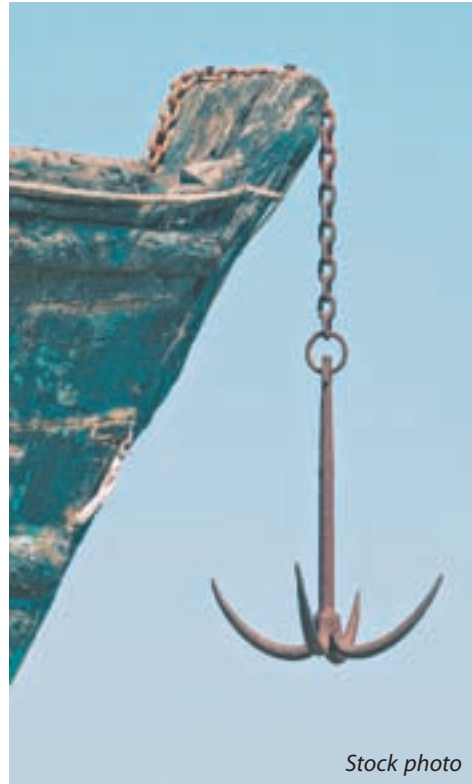
to invest my days with this aim, and truthfully, if I had the time over, I would try to do it better and with more intentionality.

Which brings me to the present.

I have realized in a fresh, new way recently that I am still the anchor man of my family and I have come into a new understanding and appreciation of the responsibility I have to them as husband, father, and grandfather.

In practical, relationship terms, this means praying for them, continuing to love and honour Karen, remaining faithful to God and reflecting Jesus in my character, and laughing, crying, and doing life with them.

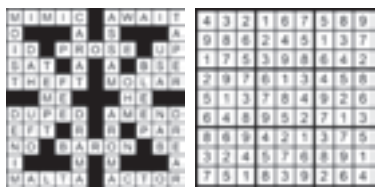
Pastor and Author, Rick Warren, said some years ago: "Love leaves a legacy. I have been at the bedside of many people in their final moments, when they stand on the edge of eternity, and I have never heard someone say, 'Bring me my diplomas! I want to look at them one more time. Show me my awards, my medals!'"



Stock photo

"When life on earth is ending, people don't surround themselves with objects. What we want around us is people – people we love and have relationships with."

What are you going to invest into the days that are left to you?



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What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? – ROMANS 6:1-2 NIV

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
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

All overseas inquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, Christian online resources

Online Bible - Olive Tree app (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	Audio Bible - Bible.is app, or Youversion Bible app
Christian radio station - CBN radio app (different channels for all genres of music)	Christian podcasts and sermons - Edifi app
Christian movies, serials and kids' shows - Good. app	Daily thoughts and inspiration - Our Daily Bread app
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - Youversion Bible app.	The Bible explained with visual aides - Bible Project on YouTube.
Alpha Film Series on Youtube - an online introduction to Christianity	For kids - Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app
Comic book Bible online- goodandevilbook.com	Manga Messiah app Christian comic with free games app, illustrated in Japanese-style art
YMI (meant to be read as "Why am I?") Christian news outlet for young adults with various content, devotionals and resources. ymi.today	More inspiring faith stories - back issues of Challenge News at challengenews.online

In another dimension

IMAGINE there are two people on a flat piece of paper. These people are two-dimensional, having height and width but no depth; the paper is the extent of their world.

Can they see you? No. They can see only what's on the paper (in their world). They have no depth perception. Now pretend you use your finger to touch the paper.

Now can they see you? They cannot see all of you, but they can see the tip of your finger, the part that has entered their world.

That is an analogy to our situation with God.

God exists outside our dimensions. He can exist outside of time and space as we know it. Therefore, it is difficult to "see" Him. We are like the flat people on the two-dimensional paper.

We can't see what's in a third dimension. But in this case, we exist in four dimensions (height, width, depth, time), and God exists beyond that.

So how are we to know such a Being? Just as the "flat people" on the paper could not know about you unless you touched the paper, we cannot detect God unless He reveals Himself.

He must "touch the paper" of our world. God has to step down in dimensions.

As we study human history, especially religious history, do we find any instances where God "touched the paper" of our world? Consider that God's "finger" has touched our world in a person known as Jesus Christ.

Jesus claimed to be God (John 8:58, 17:3), said that to see Him was to see God (John 12:45, 14:9), said that He was the only person who had come directly from God to our world (John 3:13), and forgave people of their sins, which only God can do (Mark 2:5).

Many other passages of the New Testament affirm Jesus' deity. He was God who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). He is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). If we are the "flat people" it makes sense that the multi-dimensional Creator God entered our four-dimensional world by becoming a human being.

He revealed Himself to us. But why would God do that?

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

He entered our world to live as an example and die as an atonement (payment) for our sin, in order that one day, if we commit to Him, we can come and live with Him in His multi-dimensional, perfect, timeless world for all eternity.

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

"The only love that won't disappoint you is one that can't change, that can't be lost, that is not based on the ups and downs of life – or of how well you live. It is something that not even death can take away from you. God's love is the only thing like that." – Tim Keller

Scottie Scheffler of the United States plays his second shot on the 11th hole during the final round of the 2024 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club on April 14, 2024 in Augusta, Georgia. (Photo by David Cannon/Getty Images)

INSET: Scottie holds aloft the 2024 Masters trophy. (Photo by Warren Little/Getty Images)



NOT DEFINED BY THE WIN

World number one golfer and now two-time Masters champion Scottie Scheffler says his “identity is secure forever”. But his identity isn’t in winning – though he admits he does enjoy that – it’s in the fact that his “victory was secure on the cross”.

The 27-year-old won his second Masters Tournament in three years on April 14 and says he’s “trying to glorify God” through his golf career, giving all the credit to the Lord when speaking with reporters after his wins.

This is something he does a lot, having also won back-to-back Players Championships in 2023 and 2024.

When asked how he balances his desire to golf competitively without letting it define him as a person, he says, “That all goes back to my faith... The reason why I play golf is because I’m trying to glorify God and all that He’s done in my life.”

Before his first Masters win, Scottie’s wife, Meredith, reminded him that his “identity isn’t a golf score”.

“If you win this golf tournament today, if you lose this golf tournament by 10 shots, if you never win another golf tournament again, I’m still going to love you, you’re still going to be the same person; Jesus loves you, and nothing changes,” Scottie recounts his wife’s reassurance.

“All I’m trying to do is

glorify God, and that’s why I’m here, and that’s why I’m in this position.”

Scottie says his wife regularly prays for him. “Every day when we go out there, Meredith always prays for peace, because that’s what I want to feel on the golf course, is peace and have fun and just feel [God’s] presence,” he says.

Scottie says his wife helps him to remember: “God is in control, and the Lord is leading me, and if today’s my time, then it’s my time.”

Scottie says he doesn’t expect to win.

“You don’t expect things to come to you in this life, you just do the best that you can with the hand you’re dealt and just go from there. I never really thought I was that good at golf, so I just kept practising and working hard.”

Scottie’s caddie, Ted Scott, is a veteran in the game who was on the

bag for Bubba Watson for nearly 15 years previously.

Ted had been planning to retire until he got Scottie’s call, and knows the Augusta Course better than almost any one.

“You know, I can’t speak highly enough of Ted as a person, and as a caddie,” Scottie told a press conference after a win.

“I respect him so much just as a person. He’s such a fun guy to be around, he’s a man of faith and I love him. I can’t say enough about him. The qualities you look for in a person, Ted embodies pretty much all of them.”

One of the biggest reasons Scottie wanted to work with Ted was because they’re both Christians. They first met through a Bible study about a year before they teamed up.

The caddie told Sports Spectrum Podcast in 2018, “People a lot of times think, well, if you become a Christian, God’s just gonna make everything easy for you, and that’s not the case.

“But having the God of the universe, the Creator, on your side just makes things a lot easier to deal with. And the principles of the Bible are something that, when you use them, you can see it manifest in your life.”

“[Ted] keeps things loose,” Scottie says.

“We have a lot of fun together. I respect him a lot as a person, and I respect his work ethic as a caddie. And so, for me, it’s been a pretty easy relationship so far, just because I respect him so much.”

Scottie believes it is faith, family and friends that give his life meaning.

“I’m a Christian guy, so that’s

important to me,” he said in a 2019 interview with PGATour.com.

“But even if you’re not a Christian, it is important to spend life with people you enjoy. If you don’t have close, quality friends, I don’t think whatever you’re doing is important. So that would be my most important advice to someone. Find something you enjoy doing, and enjoy doing it with other people.”

The person Scottie enjoys spending the most time with is his best friend since high school, his wife, Meredith, whom he married in 2020.

Meredith told Golf Digest: “At the beginning of high school I always thought he had a super humble ambiance about him, that he was just a really down-to-earth guy that doesn’t take himself too seriously. Even when he had amazing accomplishments, that wasn’t the most important thing about him.”

Speaking to reporters after his recent Masters win, Scottie admitted he was keen to return home to Meredith, especially as they are expecting their first child in a few weeks. Before the competition he even shared that if she went into labour mid-tournament, he’d leave the Masters, even if he was in the lead!

“I’m just out here trying to do my best.”

One of the regular golfers at Scottie’s home golf course of Royal Oaks Country Club in Dallas concurred: “As good a golfer as Scottie is, he is an even better person and the membership here certainly knows that.”

“My faith affects all aspects of my life, not just my life on the golf course,” Scottie explained.

“The Lord has given me a skill and I’m trying to use it for His glory. Outside of that, I’m just out here trying to do my best.”



Scottie and Meredith Scheffler married in 2020.

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