

ART WITH A MESSAGE

BY JANICE TEO

Patrick Bezael Lee's idea of patience used to be having to wait three minutes instead of two for his instant noodles.

The graphic artist and advertising executive worked in Singapore's competitive marketing industry, where projects had to be completed at breakneck speed and sleep was often a luxury. But, the 51-year-old tells *Challenge News* that suited him.

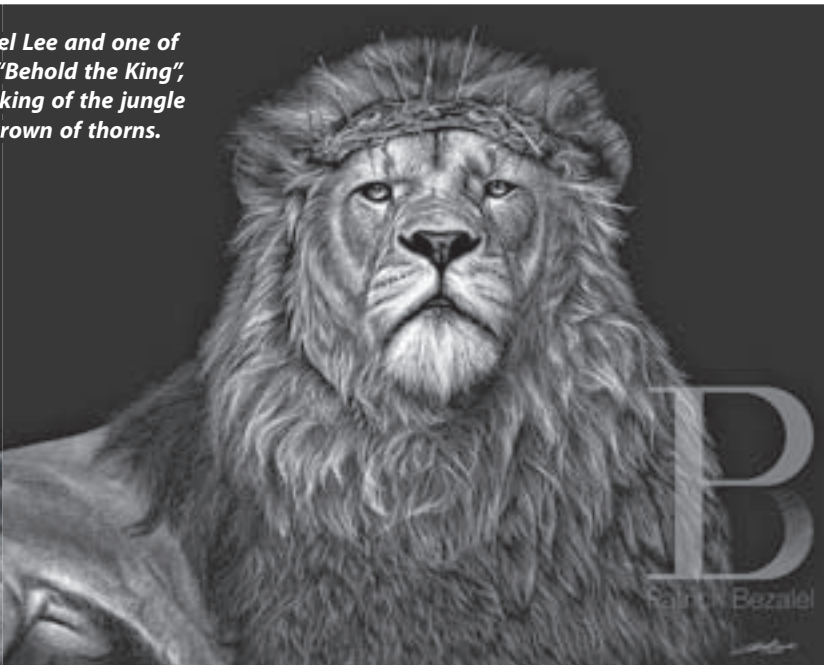
"I had ADHD and I would go three or four nights without sleep so I could finish my work as quickly as possible.

"My commercial success depended on that." Then about six years ago, he moved into the painstakingly slow world of hyper-realistic art, a field that features work so exhaustively detailed that one piece can take up to four months and 300,000 strokes.

This new direction was completely unexpected – but then, Patrick's life had taken some unforeseen twists



Patrick Bezael Lee and one of his drawings "Behold the King", depicting the king of the jungle wearing a crown of thorns.



already, the most surprising being his conversion to Christianity in 2002.

Patrick says he was a bit of a "weird case" – on the surface he was a sceptic but at a deeper level, he says somehow he always knew he would become a Christian one day.

"I was very busy with work then, no time to think about God," he continues "but God used my work to reach out to me when a local church contracted me to work on their rebranding project.

"They advised me that the best way to understand their vision and ethos would be to attend services and Bible study classes so I did."

Although it was initially purely for work that he attended church, the messages and the worship soon impacted Patrick.

"I had always judged God by the bad behaviour of some Christians I knew, but what I learned about God at the services and Bible studies blew me away; He was nothing like what I imagined Him to be."

The crunch came during a business meeting with the church's leadership team when the pastor told him: "Patrick, becoming a Christian is like deciding whether or not to jump into a pool.

"You're hot and sweaty but you're reluctant because you're afraid the water might be too cold.

"But once you take the plunge, you realise the water

is just right and you never want to come out again. Brother, it's time for you to take the plunge and ask Jesus into your heart."

Patrick shares that he said yes immediately.

"When he said that everything 'clicked' and fell into place. I had no hesitation in saying yes."

Five years later, in 2007, he left his job at the agency and became the church's creative director and part of

its youth and missions teams.

But God had even more on the drawing board for Patrick.

"One day I felt Him say to me 'son I'm going to train you in patience. Start drawing.'

"Draw what?" Patrick responded. "Anything you like," he heard God say.

Unsure where this was going, Patrick cheekily drew a human skull.

As he looked at the picture the first thought that came to him was a verse from the Bible "O Death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55)

Suddenly he stopped smiling. "That was the moment God led me into what I am doing now because I saw how powerful the Word of God is; it transformed that picture of death into a picture of life. After that I started to work on pictures of lions to depict Jesus."

One of these paintings is "Behold the King", which depicts the king of the jungle in regal repose wearing a crown of thorns.

● Turn to page 2

Fun for Kids
Pages 5, 6, 7

YOUTH TRUTH Page 9

BACK PAGE

NOT DEFINED BY THE WIN
SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER

I'll never walk alone

A wanderer at heart, Glen Cooke had a life-changing encounter in 2012 while camping on the outskirts of Laverton in Western Australia.

"I was doing this walk one morning and I felt this breeze just come over me," he shares in a 40 Stories video. "This breeze was something very different. It had the feel of electricity that just went through my body."

The Ngaanyatjarra Elder and artist remembers trembling and falling to his knees. He knew he was experiencing the presence of God. "I asked the Lord to come into my life," he shares. "That's where I received Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour."

Glen was born at Warburton Ranges; an Indigenous community in Western Australia, just south of the Gibson Desert. His ancestors were traditionally nomadic people until the settlement was established in 1934 under the auspices of the United Aborigines Mission (UAM). It was named after explorer Peter Warburton, the first European to cross the Great Sandy Desert.

Glen now lives in Wiluna and often travels alone.

"When I'm out in the bush I feel the presence of Jesus. He's there, sitting with me, by my side, sharing the campfire. I feel Jesus when I'm with my family and talking to my children and my grandchildren as well."

A talented artist since childhood, Glen's work consists of self-portraits, portraits and landscapes.

"I paint and something just comes out," he says.

"Every time I paint, God is with me.

"Jesus is someone that is more than a friend, He's more than a man that will sit with you in the pub and talk with you. Jesus is always an everlasting friend that will never leave you nor forsake you.

"He's your shadow – Someone that is always walking with you, Someone who's closer to you than your brother or your sister or your family. I just love Jesus! I'm with Him always."

Glen's message to the younger people in his communities is to seek comfort, peace and love in Jesus.

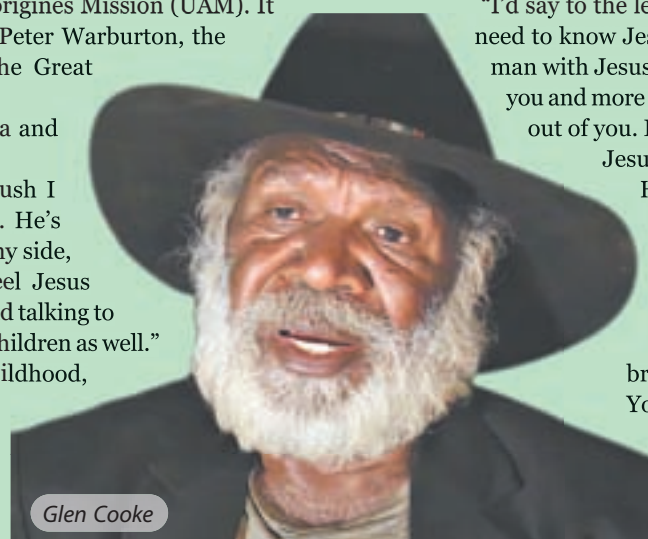
"This stuff that you are hooked on is not what you want. You need Jesus Christ to take over your life; you will find a lot of satisfaction in Jesus Christ. Jesus is a true friend and He'll give you comfort, a clean life and a clear mind. I would say to you that Jesus is a wonderful Saviour.

"I'd say to the leaders of the country that you need to know Jesus Christ. If you're a spokesman with Jesus then Jesus can work through you and more powerful words will be coming out of you. I am a bushman and I love my

Jesus and wherever I go, I trust Him and I always put Him in front of my travels and He looks after me. Jesus is a wonderful Saviour. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He is more than a brother to you or friend to you. You just want to try Him out –

Jesus is so loving!" ●

This story is used with kind permission from 40 Stories. To watch Glen's story as well as others in video form, go to 40stories.org.au



Glen Cooke

I found strength when I had nothing left

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 realised 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 realised 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."



This piece, entitled "Thirst" was inspired by Psalm 42: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." On his website, Patrick says, "This verse reveals the unspoken truth of the human soul – we are created with a deep longing that cannot be satisfied by the world. From pursuing our dreams and establishing our career to chasing romance and finding intimate connections, we spend our lives in search for something that can quench this thirst, not knowing it is found only in the person of Yeshua [the Hebrew name for Jesus] Himself. May this artwork inspire you to realise that there is more, more to life, and more of God."

ART WITH A MESSAGE

From page 1

"The lion symbolises Jesus Christ, whom the Bible calls the Lion of Judah; the crown of thorns brings to mind His death on the cross when those who crucified Him placed thorns around his head."

Today Patrick has his own gallery and uses his art to evangelise. He names his works after Biblical verses.

A pair of old and well-used boxing gloves is named "The Fight of Faith" (from 1 Timothy 6:12); a plump sparrow on a tree branch is called "Birds Do Not Worry About Tomorrow" (Matthew 6:25-26).

"I want to be a useful artist – useful to God and useful to man," he says. "I want to preach the gospel through my art and bring His love, joy and hope to Christian, secular and digital spaces."

He has also adopted the middle name "Bezalel", whom

the Bible says was a master craftsman because "I would like to be an artisan for God too," he explains.

His vision seems to be coming true. Over the last five years Patrick has sold over 1000 pieces. About 15 per cent of his buyers were non-Christians.

In fact, "Behold the King", was bought by non-believers.

When he asked them why they were buying it, they told him there was "something about the peace and kindness you've drawn in the lion's eyes".

Visitors to the gallery often sit and cry, he says. "It's very common. One elderly man cried for half-an-hour looking at the paintings until his children had to come and pick him up.

There have even been people who have become Christians. "This is what I feel God wants. He wants every piece to have a message, to carry His message of salvation."

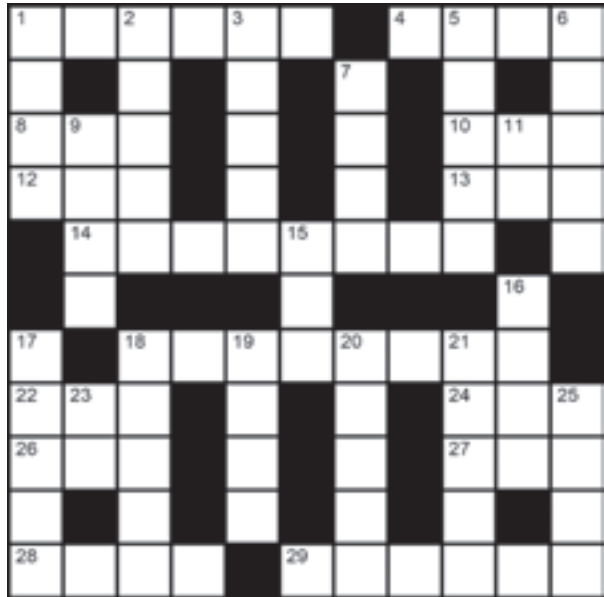
Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Break loose
- 4 It falls in flurries
- 8 Steal from
- 10 Delivery vehicle
- 12 Hit the slopes
- 13 Conclude
- 14 Forebear (8)
- 18 Not rigid (8)
- 22 Neither hot ___ cold
- 24 Unwell
- 26 Historical period
- 27 It may have a sauna
- 28 Pottery oven
- 29 Victor at Trafalgar

DOWN

- 1 Corn cobs
- 2 Log home
- 3 Former US VP Mike
- 5 Definitely not
- 6 Blowy; gusty
- 7 Camping gear

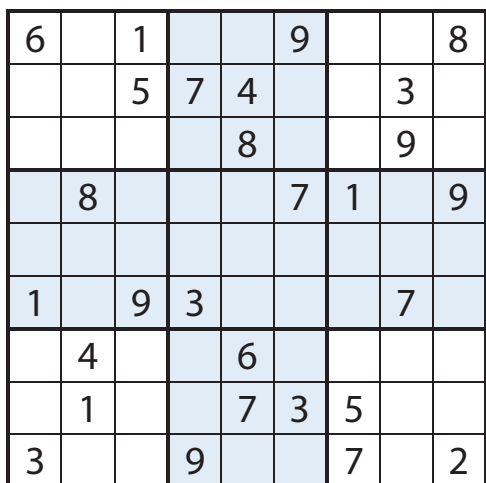


- 9 "Fine by me"
- 11 Lend ___ ear
- 15 Woodwind instrument
- 16 Mayday!
- 17 Move stealthily
- 18 Physically weak
- 19 Genesis garden
- 20 Public persona
- 21 Shoppers sheets
- 23 Alternative
- 25 Yard grass

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



"Like I'm going to give up this to migrate."



Was Joan of Arc Noah's wife?

BY NICO BOUGAS

THE phrase, "God helps those that help themselves", is often quoted as a favourite Bible verse (especially amongst pickpockets and shoplifters.) If you thought that this non-Biblical verse comes from the Bible you are in good company. According to an official survey, 82 percent of Americans thought so as well.

We get a sense of the widespread Biblical ignorance when we find that fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples. According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60 percent of the population can't name even five of the Ten Commandments.

And at least 12 percent of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Another survey of students graduating from high school revealed that over 50 percent thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. And many thought that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham. Truly although the Bible is still a best seller, we have become a generation of biblical illiterates.

Early on in his ministry, evangelist Billy Graham said, "When the Bible goes down anarchy and confusion will take its place. This will be followed by a condition such as the world has never known. This generation has to face the appalling fact that it is either back to the Bible or back to the jungle."

We neglect the study of the Bible at our peril. The Bible makes it clear that the way to progress and develop your spiritual life is to spend time studying and meditating on the Word of God. When Joshua took over from Moses to lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land,

he was given this advice: "Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do." (Joshua 1:8 NLT)

No book has had so much impact on the world as the Bible. George Washington said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

Former British Prime Minister, William Gladstone said,

"I have known 95 great men of the world in my time and of these 87 were followers of the Bible."

Abraham Lincoln said, "This book is God's greatest gift to mankind. All the good things we know about God are communicated to us through this book."

Napoleon Bonaparte said, "This is no mere book but a living creature with a power to conquer all that would oppose it."

And then there were the doubters. Voltaire said, "Within 100 years you will only find the Bible in museums



AI GENERATED IMAGE

– today his own house is the office for the Geneva Bible Society.

The American agnostic, Robert Ingersoll, predicted that within 15 years the Bible would be in a morgue – not long afterwards he was in a morgue and the Bible is still a best seller.

It is time for us to get back to the Bible or back to the jungle. It is time for us to read, study and meditate on the Word of God. It is sharper than any two edged sword; it is alive and powerful; it is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces, a fire that burnt up the chaff, and a sword that pierces into your inmost soul until you are no longer reading the Bible but the Bible is reading you.

Why not make a goal of reading through the Bible in a year? It could just be the most life-changing thing you ever do.

FROM CRIMINAL TO CRIMINOLOGIST

Arthur Bolkas recalls how everything changed for him the day he read a little book in prison.

Shanghaied 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 seventeen 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



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

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 realised 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 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, Demetri 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 needed to find a reason to live."

"If we think we are not all that bad, the idea of grace will never change us. Change comes by seeing a need for a Saviour and getting one." – Timothy Keller

The tale of the Pharisee

Neil Shenvi is a Christian apologist who is a research scientist at Duke University in the Department of Chemistry. Neil attended Princeton University, he then became a Christian while at Berkeley, CA. There he did his PhD in theoretical chemistry. His thesis focused on quantum computation.

He is married to Christina and they have four children. Neil explains his journey:

"I grew up in Delaware. I loved philosophy, loved arguing philosophy, and most of all, loved being right. I would have called myself Christian, if anyone had asked, but I thought that all religions were essentially the same.

"I had read the Bible when I was in fifth grade. I led a fairly moral life. In fact, I built my life on doing the right thing, on being a virtuous, moral person. Throughout this time, I believed in God, I said grace before meals, and I prayed every night.

"My prayers went roughly as follows: 'Dear God, thank You for all that You have given me. I have many talents, and I thank You that I realise what a blessing they are. I am generally a good person, and even though I'm not perfect, I thank You that You recognise my goodness and love me. Lord, I hope that You'll forgive me for my sins, whatever they may be. And I hope that tomorrow I'll try to be an even better person. Amen.'

"I had also read Luke 18:9, and knew that pride was bad. So occasionally, I would add something like 'God, I know I am not as good as I could be. I know I look down on other people because I am better than them, but I shouldn't.'

"But my heart was essentially saying: 'God, I know this is how I'm supposed to pray, with humility and all that, but between You and me, we both know that I'm basically a good person. And what tops it all off is that I'm so humble.'

"My senior year of college, I met Christina and fell in love with her.

"I found her faith at once interesting and inconvenient... To show my willingness to compromise, I decided to go to church with her. And that was my fatal mistake.

"At our church in Berkeley, I heard the Gospel for the first time: Jesus saves. In retrospect, I think that one defence against Christianity to which I always appealed was that Christianity could not possibly be maintained by thoughtful, intelligent people, at least not people so thoughtful and intelligent as myself. But at this church, my escape was closed off.

"Our pastor had a PhD from Oxford. My quantum physics professor sang in the choir. Here were people indisputably my intellectual superiors who believed that Jesus was Lord, and had died for their sins. And all at once, I was forced to actually consider the message of Christianity on its own merits. I didn't like it.

"I can recall the night when the claims of Christianity finally sank in. For the first time, I considered what the consequences would be if Christianity were true – histori-



Neil Shenvi. Photos from Facebook/Neil Shenvi – Apologetics.

cally, objectively true. What if God were the God of the Bible? What if Jesus was who He said He was?

"I knew that the word 'gospel' was Greek for 'good news', but I remember weeping and telling Christina that this was the most horrible news I had ever heard.

"What about all the people who had never heard of Jesus? What about people who had died before Jesus was born? What about devout followers of other religions?

"But for once, I finally stopped to consider whether Christianity was true in spite of all my questions. And I think I prayed something like: 'God, if this is true, tell me, and I will believe.'

"Of course, I didn't obtain answers for my questions immediately. And I still grapple with many of those same questions.

"But I think that was the point when I decided to put my trust in God, and over many subsequent months, He led me to Jesus.

"Jesus says to us: none of you can be his own saviour. You are all sinners. You're all suffering, you're all dying inside.

"The gospel was fire and water to me. It saw through all of my attempts at self-justification, which is what all of the competition and virtue was.

"Throughout the Bible, Jesus' message is that God loves us, not because we are good, but because He is good.

Jesus came to save not the righteous, but sinners. He gives us the verdict that we are all longing to hear: that we are loved, that our lives are worth something; worth so much, in fact, that God gave up the treasure of His heart to save us. What we couldn't earn despite our best efforts, God freely gives.

"Knowing Jesus has made a tremendous difference in my life. Now I can obey God out of love and gratitude, not out of fear of punishment or desire for reward.

"I hope that the rest of my life will be spent learning to depend entirely on God's grace." •

This is an abridged article; the full article can be found at jamesbishopblog.com

"God loves us, not because we are good, but because He is good."



Neil with one of his books, Critical Dilemma.

Vivid dream leaves atheist terrified

When Florence Mambwe was a teenager she had a dream that was as senseless as it was terrifying.

The Singaporean student dreamt she was in a huge open field surrounded by high-rise towers when a massive earthquake struck, cracking open the ground and sending buildings crumbling.

"I saw some people falling into the cracks and others going up into the sky; I was terrified," she says in a YouTube video for the Why-Jesus? channel.

"I was transported into a space where you couldn't see the horizon. Everything was colourless. There was no grass or buildings like a judgement place, but it was filled with people.

"In my dream I was transfixed by what was happening."

Suddenly three figures entered the scene – the Buddhist goddess Kwan Yin on the left, the Hindu god Vishna on the right, and in the middle, Jesus Christ.

As the three figures stood still, the sea of people in Florence's dream began moving either to the left or the right, obscuring Jesus from her view.

Florence stayed rooted to the spot and suddenly heard Jesus asking her: "Where do you belong?"

She replied: "I don't know." And then she woke up.

Florence had no idea why someone like her, an atheist whose family practised ancestor worship, would dream so vividly of Jesus Christ.

"I didn't believe in a heaven or hell," she shares. "I just thought when we die we'll all be buried six feet underground and that's the end of it.

"But somehow I knew the dream was very significant because no atheist would dream of Jesus."

Life got very busy as Florence moved to the UK for midwifery studies and the dream got shelved to the back of her mind.

In England, eager to make friends, she joined the Chinese Society as well as a fellowship group run by an elderly missionary couple.

Before long she found herself facing a difficult choice – the fellowship group was organising an evangelical rally on the same night as the Chinese Society planned a disco evening.

"I wanted to go to the disco, but my friends, who were Christians, wanted to go to the rally," Florence says.

"They asked me to go to the rally and I mumbled 'well if there's a God He will tell me where to go'. It didn't even sound like a prayer!"

The day before the events, she bumped into the president of the Chinese Society, who told her the disco evening had been cancelled because another group needed the venue.

"I thought this was strange so I said to myself 'okay, looks like I'm going to the Christian rally then'."

She remembers not being overly impressed by the rally, but says she was touched by the many testimonies of healing, protection and guidance.



Florence is now 72 and lives in Australia.

She did not respond to the altar call to commit her life to Christ, but couldn't stop thinking about what she had heard that night.

Florence, then 22, was at a crossroad and had been wrestling over whether to stay in England or return to Singapore after her studies.

"I couldn't sleep that night so I just went down on my knees and I said 'God I literally don't know You but if You can guide those people's lives and save them and heal them, I'd like You to come into my life and guide mine because I don't know what to do after this. I know from the scriptures that I have heard that I am sinful. I'm not perfect; I've done wrong things. I ask for Your forgiveness. Come into my life and guide me.'

"That was it. From then on I

attended [the fellowship group's] meetings and Bible studies."

It was during a Bible study on the second coming of Jesus Christ that Florence's dream jumped off the back shelves of her memory.

"We were reading 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 – 'For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.'

"Straight away I knew that was my dream when I saw people going up into the sky.

"I realised the Lord was actually warning me that He's coming back, that there is a heaven and a hell and

there are two groups of people and He's asking me which one do I belong to?"

Florence, now 72 and living in Australia, says the Lord has carried her through many trials and pains.

She shares that the Lord gave this promise from Isaiah 54:10 when she left England – "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you."

"He has been true to His Word. I have gone through trials and pain but His loving kindness has always been with me and I have experienced miracles of healing. I pray that people will take heart and know that God is real; Jesus is real, not a story." •

“
No atheist would dream of Jesus.
”

nudge

WITH KARL FAASE

Pampered child syndrome

MAGGIE Mamen, a Canadian clinical psychologist, has released a book to encourage all parents. It's called *The Pampered Child Syndrome*.

For Maggie the problem with most kids is that they don't understand the idea of boundaries and get a warped view of life. When parents say they want their children to be happy and comfortable the spoilt kid thinks they should always be happy and comfortable. The spoilt child ends up with the attitude that when they experience loss or failure, feel upset or disappointed that someone should make them feel better.

Maggie is seeking to help parents understand that failing to give your children firm and loving boundaries just produces spoilt and pampered kids who grow up with all the wrong expectations of life.

In some ways, all of us are like children. We all need clear boundaries within which we should act and behave, and to know that we are loved. I believe that God gives us both of these. God's boundaries are not there to ruin our lives but rather to give us standards of behaviour designed to maximise our life.

Jesus came to give us abundant life. •



STOCK PHOTO

I FOUND A SOLID FOUNDATION

Chad Meister, a young electromechanical engineer who had grown up questioning the reality of God, was sitting in his apartment in Tempe, Arizona. He was holding a gun. Mired in depression, he was on the verge of pulling the trigger.

In the midst of his anguish, he called out, "God, if You're there, please show me, because I don't want to live anymore. And if You're not there, life's not worth living." With that, he instantly had a vision. Everything went dark, and all he could see were black-and-white letters spelling out "Acts 14:22".

"I had no idea what that was," he recalls. "I thought maybe it had something to do with the Bible, but I'd never read the Bible, although I had heard of some of the books in it."

Putting down the gun, he went out, got a Bible, came back to his apartment, and searched until he found the chapter and verse, in which Paul and Barnabas tell the disciples, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

That sentiment registered deeply with Chad. As he thought on the travails of his life, he realised for the first time that God had been there all along, pursuing him, but Chad had repeatedly pushed Him away and walked in the other direction.

His depression lifted. Right there in his apartment, Chad committed his life to God. He vowed, "I'm going to follow You wherever that leads."

Sure enough, his life changed. He married a Christian accountant named Tammi, and they moved to Minneapolis, where they attended a church that encouraged congregants to tell others about Jesus. He decided to do just that – but his efforts backfired.

Chad had never really studied why he was a Christian or built solid faith foundations, so when his boss extolled Hinduism, or a Mormon colleague shared her beliefs, or a New Ager challenged him, Chad became disorientated.

"My head was spinning," he said. "I was so confused. I didn't know what to believe anymore. My faith drained away, and I became agnostic."

Christian friends gently encouraged Chad to carefully analyse differing worldviews. Which is reasonable? Which is logical? Which is livable? Which one has evidence on its side?

"I started at square one by asking the question, 'What is truth?' Chad explained. "I ended up researching worldviews for a year-and-a-half. At the end, the conclusion was clear: Christianity is the most reasonable, the most livable, the best supported evidentially, and it matched my own personal experience of God. So I recommitted my life to Christ."



Chad Meister. Photo from YouTube/ CloserToTruthTV

So exhilarating was his spiritual investigation that Chad decided to leave his engineering career and to study theology and philosophy instead. Today, he is a highly respected and widely published scholar. He has authored, co-authored, or edited more than 20 books. His first, *Constructing Faith from the Ground Up*, explains the "apologetics pyramid, a visual depiction of how a quest for the truth about Christianity can be logically and systematically pursued".

• First layer – Truth – why can't everyone be right? What is true is the truth, not my truth or your truth?

• Second layer – Worldviews – The clash of the three isms – theism, atheism, pantheism. Test each by logic and livability. "Pantheism and atheism are disqualified because of logical contradictions, incoherence, and unlivable claims; theism survives," states Chad.

• Third layer – Theism – The fingerprints of God: for example: The fine-tuning of the universe, the fact that the universe had a beginning "whatever begins to exist has a cause", and the moral argument – "if there are objective moral values, then God exists".

• Fourth layer – Revelation – Has God spoken to humankind? Is it plausible to believe the New Testament can be trusted? Bibliographical test (how many copies do we have and how do they compare to each other?), internal evidence (eyewitness accounts), external evidence (other writers that reference the events of the Bible).

• Fifth layer – Resurrection – Did Jesus rise from the dead? The historical facts are clear and convincing. Christ's body has never been found, the change in the disciples and their willingness to be martyred, more than 500 people saw Jesus alive after His crucifixion.

Chad concludes: "Christianity is the worldview that makes the most sense to me. It's plausible and livable. As the pyramid demonstrates, it's built on a solid foundation that can be trusted. In fact, through the years a lot of people who started out as doubters have become believers after studying the evidence." •

Abbreviated from an account of Chad's testimony in *The Case for Heaven* by Lee Strobel

“
I'm going to follow You wherever that leads.
”

A FULL CIRCLE JOURNEY

Stephan (not his real name) operates an evangelistic ministry to Muslims in some 20 countries. It is risky and dangerous work. Under Sharia (or Islamic) law, Muslims can be put to death for converting to Christianity.

There are also risks for Stephan and his family because evangelising is frowned upon in Islamic countries, and in some cases, illegal. It is for these reasons that Challenge is not using his real name or his pictures.

It's unusual to say the least, to find an ethnic German with a science doctorate witnessing in Arabic in Muslim lands. Stephan's passage from the halls of learning to the mission field began when he was four.

His parents, who were missionaries, were sent to Lebanon by a mission society. Growing up in Lebanon meant that Stephan was fluent in spoken and written Arabic from an early age.

He became a Christian in his teens. That same year, he says, "I fell in love with the stars and decided to become an astronomer."

He returned to Europe for his studies and work, eventually earning his doctorate in astrophysics. During that time, he had an office in an observatory near Hamburg.

On the wall, he displayed a poster of a planetary nebula with the words: "In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."



German astrophysicist, theologian and philosopher 'Stephan' now works in Islamic countries.

(Colossians 2:3) "Most of my colleagues shook their heads and smiled when I professed my faith in God as creator of the universe," he says. "My eventual decision to shift from astrophysics to theology was met with total lack of understanding."

Nonetheless, though strongly believing that God had created everything, he would argue with biblical creationists, believing that he "could not deny evolution as science. I never tried to reconcile evolution with creation."

It was more two separate realms that were irreconcilable in my life."

Stephan's thirst for deep understanding is evident in his journey. In his mid-20s, he already came to realise "the inherent philosophical limitations of science and even mathematics – e.g. Gödel's Incompleteness Theorems, which formally show that no axiomatic system at least as complex as arithmetic can prove its own consistency."

He also spent eight years of philosophical study and eight years

of religious studies, especially rabbinical Judaism and Islam and, more recently, Buddhism.

In the 1980s, Stephan even gave some talks on evolution and the Bible.

"Not knowing that evolution is a lie, I tried to explore the theological implications of the challenge that evolution posed for the Christian faith," he explains.

"One point I was not willing to give up was the doctrine of sin. I viewed the trench separating Christianity from evolution as rooted in our sinfulness, which for me formed the whole context of the debate."

Stephan spent years genuinely seeking to reconcile what he calls "the gap between theology and physics, including the quantum world."

However, he says he found it impossible to do so "without reducing the biblical God to being a part of this world."¹

"I was not willing to compromise concerning my faith in Him, so in midlife, I aborted this project and decided to go into missions. I also consciously chose to turn my back on all academia, and focus only on the Bible and what it teaches."

It was only relatively recently that, starting with the reading of a creation science book, he says he also lost his trust in the scientific viability of evolution.

Soon after, Stephan discovered CMI's website creation.com, which has been of great help to him in reconciling his faith in Christ and the Gospel with the 'facts of science'.

While teaching academic theology in Switzerland, Stephan "was part of an interdisciplinary research group of physicists and theologians at my university exploring the interface between these two disciplines."

He was also secretary of the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology (ESSSAT), organising international conferences on science and theology.

He says, "I had regular contact with people like (professors and theologians) Ian Barbour, Robert John Russell, John Polkinghorne, and Arthur

Peacocke.

"All professed to be Christians, but were decidedly evolutionists."

"In these circles I never encountered the least trace of faith in a biblical creation."

"So I always felt deeply out of phase with them, because I had an evangelistic heart and was helping my father in his outreach to Muslims."

Stephan's chief interest remains Islam, where "the main barriers to the gospel (the good news about Jesus) are the flat denials of the Koran that Christ is divine, that He died on the cross and that He rose from the dead."

A major hindrance often brought up in his work involves "the wars that 'Christian' states have conducted (during colonial times) and are currently seen to be conducting against Muslim peoples and states."

Evolution is seldom a problem for the gospel in the Muslim world, he says, although what the Koran teaches about creation is very different to the Bible.²

Stephan is working on a study of the over 900 explicit

Koranic references to creation, showing how these often directly confront "the biblical testimony on the creation of the heavens and the earth".

In contrast, in very secular 'evolutionised' Europe, he says, "the main hindrance to the gospel is what I call 'enlightened humanism'; the conscious or implicit disbelief in God as such (no God is needed to create the world).

"Or, what is even more dangerous, the reduction of the biblical God to the realms of human feeling and thinking, as is the tendency in 'theistic evolutionary' circles."

It was encouraging to hear Stephan's story; with a deep understanding of all that secular wisdom had to offer, he had in a sense come full circle to stand solely on the Bible. •

References and notes

1. Technically called 'pantheism', the view of Arthur Peacocke, for example; creation.com/templeton.
2. Catchpoole, D., The Koran vs Genesis, Creation 24(2):46-51, 2002; creation.com/koran.

“My decision to shift from astrophysics to theology was met with total lack of understanding.”

Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

PETER'S CORNER WITH PETER MIKULA

WHICH came first, the chicken or the egg? This is an interesting and fun question that most of us have come across. But how can we answer it? We know that we can't have an egg without a chicken first that could lay the egg. But equally, we can't have a chicken without an egg that it can hatch from.

We can read on various websites about the concept that the egg came first. There are two lines of thinking. The first is that some kind of pre-chicken laid an egg that carried enough mutations to transform it into a chicken egg.

Recall that mutations are mistakes in DNA copying, and not sources of new information. Mutations are nearly always damaging, and may threaten the life and reproduction of the bird. Knowledge continues to grow about the amazingly complex activities going on inside every living cell.

Every cell is packed with machinery to detect and repair any mutations that occur.

If small mutations could in fact result in a nearly-chicken laying an egg that was a real-chicken, then today we would be seeing many examples of chicken eggs hatching out a new no-more-chicken creature. But chicken eggs continue to hatch into chickens, same as always.

The second explanation given for eggs coming first is that a long time ago dinosaurs laid eggs, and that birds including chickens evolved from dinosaurs, so eggs were around long before chickens. But we then ask the next question: what came first, the dinosaur or the egg? And then ask: what came first, the pre-dinosaur or the pre-dinosaur egg? So it is not a logical answer at all.

We can also look at fossil evidence claiming that some bird fossils are older than dinosaur fossils. So how could birds evolve from dinosaurs?

Another observation is that the small handful of claimed "missing link" creatures between dinosaurs and birds are strongly disputed. If birds came from dinosaurs,

the fossil record should show a huge number of fossil transitions between dinosaurs and birds, but they are just not there.

So maybe the chicken came first? I read recently about an interesting discovery by researchers at the University of Warwick.

They found that a protein called ovocleidin-17 (OC-17) was a catalyst that allowed chicken eggshells to be constructed very quickly, in just hours. The OC-17 kick-started the assembly of calcium carbonate molecules into the calcite of eggshell in a very efficient manner. The researchers found the protein was present only in chicken ovaries, and that led to comments about the chicken needing to come first.

To me, none of the answers are satisfying. The chicken – or any other creature – needs to be 100 percent complete and functional right from the start.

The many kinds of machines, proteins, DNA and everything else in the cell are all needed together for the cell to function.

Cells will not work if just one or two parts of the cell exist, while waiting millions of years for the rest of the cell to evolve. Likewise, what would happen if the first chicken can't lay an egg till another million years have passed by?

So evolution cannot answer the chicken/egg question, regardless of what the websites say. Only a supremely intelligent designer and builder could make a chicken, and that's the God of the Bible. We can read the answer in Genesis 1, and we know the Bible is trustworthy because of its true testimony about Jesus' life, death and rising back to life.

I hope this discussion helps you as much as it has me in our walk to know God better, to take one step closer and move one level higher every day. •

Source: Freeman C, Harding JH, Quigley D, Rodger PM. Structural Control of Crystal Nuclei by an Eggshell Protein. *Angewandte Chemie International Edition*, DOI: 10.1002/anie.201000679.

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





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YOUTH TRUTH

I walked out on *The Bachelor*

BY CLARA CZER

Since leaving her spot on *The Bachelor* due to her faith-based beliefs regarding purity and waiting for marriage, Madi Prewett has become a voice countering hook-up culture.

She shocked her date, the cast, and viewers when she stood up and walked out from a romantic dinner with Bachelor Peter Weber, who appeared to be surprised by her stand, saying: "I would have loved to have had that conversation a little bit sooner."

"I'm not in any way trying to come across as judgmental," she told Peter, a pilot who had walked away from Christianity, in the fantasy suite. "But at the same time, those are my expectations that I have in life. In a week from now, if you're down on one knee and six days before that you slept with somebody else, I just can't wrap my mind around that."

The conversation in the Fantasy Suite cost Peter his chance to win Madi. Peter admitted to getting intimate with two other contestants during the February 2020 showing of the 24th season.

Madi explained: "My faith is literally everything to me and I have saved myself for marriage. I can't keep moving forward and continuing this relationship if I don't get the clarity and peace and confidence that I need." Following Madi's walkout, her Instagram following shot up to 1.7 million, and her TikTok hit 2 million as Christian youth, hungry for a good example responded to her choices. Madi has since written a book about purity, *The Love Everybody Wants*, and today is married to Pastor Grant Troutt. Madi told the Questions with Caden podcast that she had been

raised in a Christian home but her faith became real for her in college.

She recalled reaching a crossroads where she could choose to give in to the temptations and pressures of college life and be a part of the 'cool crowd' or a life that can only be satisfied by Jesus. "We all want to be loved. We all want to be known. We all want to feel like we belong. And so I came into college thirsting for those things, but looking for it in a sorority, looking for it in friendships, looking for it in guys... At the end of my first semester of my freshman year of college, I had this moment with the Lord where I was like, 'I feel like when I was younger, I used to know You. And I feel like I used to know me, like I used to know myself... I just had that moment of crying and asking the Lord, 'I'm sorry for making You this religious figure, I'm sorry for making it all about rules. And what my family thinks about You. I want to get back to a place where it's You and me. And we have our own personal relationship.'"

She got involved in Christian small groups, did lots of volunteering and had a steady boyfriend for four years.

She graduated in 2018 with a Bachelor of Science in Communications from Auburn University. Simultaneously, she completed a ministerial program of pastoral leadership at Highlands College of Birmingham.

Everything was going according to plan except her boyfriend. After four years of dating, why hadn't he proposed? Eventually, they mutually agreed to break it off.

In 2019, she worked as a foster care parent recruiter. A friend who attended her Bible study applied on her behalf for her to become one of the contestants on *The Bachelor*. She had previously appeared on *The Price is Right*, winning \$8000, and seemed to have the type of bubbly personality TV shows love.

But when she got the call to participate in *The Bachelor*, she was surprised and even told the recruiter it must be a mistake because she wasn't a good fit for the format. She checked with her mother, expecting confirmation that she shouldn't participate in the show.

But her mum felt God said she should participate with 29 other contestants vying for the bach-

elor's attentions. It could be a chance for her to shine her light of faith.

"Saying yes to *The Bachelor* wasn't something I planned," Madi says. "I trusted that this was where God was leading me and I was choosing to walk in courage, even though every voice around me (and even inside me) was fearful of what could happen." As the season progressed, it became evident that Madi and Peter had more than a small spark.

“—————
The cost is worth it.
—————”

But while Peter was playing the field, Madi stayed true to her biblical convictions.

"There's a cost for every single one of us when we stay true to ourselves and when we stand firm in our beliefs against people who don't understand it or who don't like it," Madi says. "The cost is worth it because I get to walk in my purpose."

In 2022, she met and married Grant Troutt in a whirlwind romance. Grant, a former college athlete and currently a youth pastor in Texas is the son of billionaire Kenny Troutt.

"Faith isn't so much predicated on feeling or on circumstance," Madi told Fox News.

"I think when we choose to believe in something bigger than ourselves, we're choosing to believe that component of life right through the highs and lows of life."

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

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

BY JANICE TEO

Abdul Hadji learned the hard way about fair-weather friends. The gang of "street brothers" he had bonded with from the time he was 16 and considered to be his family deserted him when he went to jail at 23 for crimes including grievous bodily harm and drug dealing.

When he came out of prison two years later, he found himself alone, a drug addict with nowhere to go and no-one he could count on.

Abdul didn't start out on the wrong side of the tracks. Moving to Perth from Somalia with his mother when he was two, he tells *Challenge News* he had "a great childhood, even though my father was never in the picture". He did his primary education at the Australian Islamic College in Perth. When he was 12, his mother sent her increasingly rebellious son to Egypt for three years to be further immersed in Muslim studies and culture.

"I was a good Muslim boy. I prayed five times a day and learned my Koran. I had a lot of freedom, but my life there was quite disciplined because I had family friends who looked after me."

He returned to Perth in 2010. Tragedy struck the following year when his mother, who was pregnant and planning to get married, died suddenly. Her baby died too.

Abdul was 16. Heartbroken, lonely and without any parental supervision, Abdul began hanging out with the wrong crowd – the gang was the closest thing to a family he could find.

"I tried to numb myself with drinks and drugs. Nobody would help because the Muslim community frowned on my behaviour."

Soon he was not only taking drugs, but became "a functioning addict" hooked on meth.

"Meth makes you crazy. You lose all your morals, your self-respect. That's what happened to me."

His path became "very dark" as he drifted into more and more crime – drug-dealing, break-ins, robberies and assaults.

His crimes led to several short stints in prison, but he faced a much lengthier sentence in 2017 when he was arrested on a charge of grievous bodily harm.

He spent six months in remand while his case was investigated and was very relieved when he was handed a suspended sentence for the crime.

The time he spent in remand taught him one thing – "I realised I didn't have any real friends or family," he says.



Abdul Hadji

"My gang family deserted me. After my arrest and sentencing I knew I needed to change. I honestly thought I would be dead by 30 if I didn't change my life."

However, without the resources or contacts to change his environment, he drifted as a "functioning addict" for the next five years working odd jobs and still dealing drugs.

Then, while getting high at a friend's house one day, he met Ian, a young Christian who dropped in occasionally.

Ian invited Abdul to church and he agreed to go.

"Why did I go? I wanted to go somewhere where there weren't any drug people. I knew I couldn't change if I stayed in the same environment."

Abdul began going to church. "The music was awesome, the people were friendly. There was no judgement. Also, I saw that Ian was always so joyful and at peace. I wanted what he had – and he said all of that came from Jesus." He was, however, still hopelessly hooked on drugs. So when a friend told him about Teen Challenge, the international Christian rehabilitation organisation that has an academy in Perth, he jumped at the chance and enrolled in its residential program in October 2021.

"When I first got here, I wasn't the nicest person," he admits. "I was hostile and disagreeable."

But within six months Abdul changed completely and committed his life to Jesus Christ.

What made the difference?

"I was loved as I had never been loved before. The people here loved on me without anything to gain. They just accepted me, even with my bad attitude."

"And I learned about Christ. The biggest thing for me was the concept of grace – of His freely given salvation. Growing up my faith had been very works-based. I had to earn God's favour. But Jesus gives it freely. You just have to accept it."

"I saw that same quality in the people here."

Today Abdul is on staff at Teen Challenge. He completed his studies as a support worker and works as a mentor and student leader.

"Jesus has changed everything about me. I no longer carry around all that anger and resentment."

"Today I can think about getting married and having a family one day – it's a miracle that I can actually think of doing that. I used to think I was too far gone to be fixed but that's just not true. God can change your life if you're willing to obey Him and do the work."

"Nothing is wasted in His kingdom. Everything you've been through can be a lesson for other people so they won't have to go through what you did."



Madison Prewett in 2020 at *The Broken Hearts Gallery x Sony Pictures Drive-In Experience at the Sony Pictures*. (Photo by Eric Charbonneau/Getty Images for Sony Pictures)

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Published 11 months of the year by Challenge Literature Fellowship (ABN 98 206 125 814).

Editor: Harriet Coombe.

Staff writers: Janice Teo, Simeon Neo.

PRICING: au.challenge.news/pricing/

Challenge Literature Fellowship, PO Box 978 Cloverdale WA 6985
08 9453 3311 Email: accounts@challenge.news

lifestyle and entertainment



PUNK ROCK BROWNIES

ALL too often brownies are dry, crumbly, and boring. These brownies are different. They turn the volume up to 11, spike their hair, and don't conform. Qualities that you might dread in a teenager, but are great in a dessert.

Prep: 30 min
Cook: 30 min
Total: 1 hour
Yields 24 brownies

Ingredients:
155g/1 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
10g/2 tablespoons dark cocoa powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cayenne red pepper
1 teaspoon cinnamon
312g dark chocolate (60 to 72% cacao), coarsely chopped
1 cup butter, cut into pieces
2 teaspoons instant espresso powder
288g/1 ½ cups sugar
96g/½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
5 large eggs, at room temperature
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

Method:
 Preheat the oven to 180°C. Butter the sides and bottom of a 23x33cm glass or light-coloured metal baking pan. In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, salt, cocoa powder and spices. Melt chocolate, butter, and espresso powder in a double boiler, stirring occasionally,

until the chocolate and butter are completely melted and smooth. Turn off the heat, but keep the bowl over the water and add the sugars. Whisk until completely combined, then remove the bowl from the pan. The mixture should be room temperature. Add 3 eggs to the chocolate mixture and whisk until combined. Repeat with remaining eggs. Add the vanilla extract to the chocolate mixture and stir until just combined. Pour the chocolate mixture into the bowl with the flour. Using a spatula (not a whisk), fold the flour mixture into the chocolate until just a bit of the flour mixture is visible. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and smooth the top. Bake in the centre of the oven for 30 minutes, rotating the pan halfway through the baking time, until a toothpick inserted into the centre of the brownies comes out with a few moist crumbs sticking to it. Let the brownies cool completely, then cut them into squares and serve with milk or ice cream.

Recipe and photo from MakeBetterFood.com

SUCCESS LED ME DOWN A DARK PATH

It was perhaps only a matter of time before *American Idol* contestant Jimmy Levy embraced the occult.

The 25-year-old, who made it to the third round of the 2020 competition before being eliminated, claimed at the audition that he was able to see ghosts. His mother, he said, was a psychic.

He found fame and success in the competition, but instead of leading him to fulfilment, his big break led him down a dark path.

"When I was in the industry, I became very lonely, depressed, and I realised how dark it is," Jimmy tells Fox News Digital. He witnessed other musicians engaging in witchcraft and decided to start joining in.

"I would put a stupid tattoo on my hand of the devil," Jimmy tells *The Christian Post*. "I started hanging out around people that would proclaim themselves as worshipers of the devil. And I just didn't understand what I was getting myself into."

Jimmy shares on his Instagram account, "What may have appeared as a smile on my face in many photos and at public appearances, was really an empty void that I would fill with drugs, alcohol, partying and hanging out with the wrong crowd.

"Nothing I did externally, could fill this intangible void. The attention and endless opportunities weren't enough. The connections at the time weren't helping, I continued to find myself sinking in this endless abyss with no end in sight!"

Jimmy explains that the partying, which had begun as a way for him to fit in with the music industry, had slowly become his identity.

"I was doing a lot of things that were affecting my voice," he admits. "At one point, I found myself unable to sing without losing my voice and was desperate for an answer.

"I would constantly numb myself with drugs and alcohol, and get tormented every night by demons. I realised that Satan was real."



Jimmy Levy

Well if Satan was real, so was Jesus. The problem was that Jimmy had always rejected the gospel message that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for mankind's sins.

"I completely rejected God and anything that had to do with Christianity my entire life, because of both how I was raised and my lingering childhood trauma," he shares.

Thankfully he had a very persistent preacher friend by the name of Nik, who kept in touch regularly.

"Nik would call me and try to tell me about Jesus, but I didn't want to hear it. I would always say that I am Jewish and have no reason to learn about Him, goodbye."

Nik was the first person Jimmy called when he realised he was spiritually in

very dangerous waters.

"I immediately called Nik and I asked him what I should do. He told me to get baptised, to get a Bible.

"When I started reading the Bible and I sang my first worship song, I felt overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit. I know now that through every trial and tribulation, God was with me."

Jimmy was baptised in 2021 and has turned his back completely on his occult past.

Since becoming a Christian, he sees the world differently.

"Since I gave my life to the Lord on July 4, 2021, I have been making music for Him and He has carried some of my songs all over the world.

"There's some point where God gives you the eyes to see and you have a chance to turn from the past of the agendas that you're promoting ... if you're given the eyes to see it, you have to deny that money. You have to deny that world. You have to deny the fame, everything, and just do what's right for God.

"I'm a living, breathing, walking testimony of what the love of Christ can do. Whatever you're struggling with, I can say with complete confidence that Jesus is real and you're not beyond His reach!"



Deeply touching emotional dilemmas

BY RUSTY WRIGHT

EVER fear rejection in romance? Concerned about family members you love experiencing troubled relationships? Been tempted to stray? Wondering whether or how faith and God fit into life's complicated messes? If so, you'll probably connect right away with MGM/Amazon's new deeply moving TV series, *The Baxters*.

The Baxters is based on a best-selling book series by popular novelist Karen Kingsbury. Actor/producer Roma Downey (*Touched by an Angel*, *The Bible*, *Ben Hur*) produced and stars. Kathy Lee Gifford also appears.

Surprising discovery
 Although romance novels like Kingsbury's are not my personal interest, some of her works have become record-setting Hallmark movies. So, I decided to view the pilot. I came away gripped by the storyline with its emotional dilemmas, ethical choices, and relationship struggles. I felt like someone had been reading my mail, or my diary.

Elizabeth Baxter (Roma Downey) with her husband, John (Ted McGinley), and their four adult children seek to navigate life's complexities together. An attractive, successful, and happy family, their joy turns to grief when daughter Kari discovers from a tipster that her husband, college professor Tim, has been having an affair with one of his students. Crushed, Kari feels angry, betrayed, confused, afraid, and desperate. But, through her tears, she's determined to seek a divine remedy. When confronted, Tim argues that



their once-hope-filled marriage is dead, that his new lover fulfills him. Kari's dad recommends a divorce attorney; her sister Ashley thinks she's crazy to hold on to hope. Tim's student paramour, Angela, seems smitten but wishes Tim would be more public about their relationship. Complicating things for Kari, Ryan, a former love interest, is back in town.

Relationship struggles
 Anyone who's experienced a rocky marriage or divorce (as I have) likely will appreciate the pain and heartfelt struggles the couple exhibits. Even strong relationships can experience rejection fears. Family and friends of troubled partners will understand the worry and uncertainty about how to advise: "Dump him; he doesn't deserve you?" "Pray and hold on; God will find a way?" *The Baxters*

portrays both perspectives.

Faith's relevance?
 For many like the Baxters, faith and God play a part in their daily lives.

In mine, anger with God for allowing the mess I helped create clouded my life for about two years. In retrospect, I was blaming Him for my own poor choices.

Eventually, some fellow university students helped me understand how God's love deals with my shortcomings, and my option to accept His gift of forgiveness. Which I did.

Divine friendship has helped manage life's curves since then.

Some Baxter family members pray together amid life's challenges. Others question faith's relevance. All seek to support the hurting.

Emotional intelligence
 Roma and her husband, producer Mark Burnett, have dedicated their lives to producing inspirational content for mainstream media. Nearly 30 million copies of Karen Kingsbury's books are in print.

The series is available on Prime Video. Episode 1, the pilot, left me curious for more, and the remainder of season 1 did not disappoint.

I especially appreciated the focus on emotional intelligence and managing feelings, essential in today's world. Well worth watching.

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



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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

What I have learned in 43 years of marriage

BY ROB FURLONG

THIS month my wife and I celebrate 43 years of marriage so I would like to talk about the difference God can make in your marriage.

Karen and I both come from dysfunctional family backgrounds, so before we married, we made a commitment to God and each other that we'd work hard to not repeat the mistakes of our families of origin.

What difference has God made for me personally in my marriage?

I have discovered the joy of loving my wife sacrificially.

Husbands are instructed to "love their wives" and it's the kind of love that is willing to put the other person's needs ahead of your own, being willing to serve that person and to consider their interests before your own.

This kind of love doesn't come easily, especially when you're in the heat of an argument and your wife (you believe) is being unreasonable!

So, the only way I can possibly love like this is to ask God to help me. The perfect example of sacrificial love is

seen in His Son Jesus who gave up His own life for us when we did not deserve it.

My default button drifts toward selfishness when I'm under pressure so I need the occasional reminder that I also am not perfect but God still loves me anyway!

I have learned that honesty is liberating in marriage.

I'm talking here about honesty with your wife about where you are "at." There have been times in my marriage

where I've thought it best to not share with Karen what I might be struggling with at any given moment. It's not that I have sought to be deceptive or tried to hide things from her – I just didn't want to cause her unnecessary worry or concern.



STOCK PHOTO

This isn't a good policy!

Firstly, if I don't share with her then I miss out on one of the greatest privileges of marriage. That of being supported, cared for, and prayed for by my best friend. As Solomon wisely said in Ecclesiastes 4:9, "two are better than one" because they can lean on each other in the storms of life.

Secondly, Karen can read me like a book, so there is no point in me trying to simply soldier on!

I have found that good communication develops greater intimacy between us. One of the great descriptions of marriage in the Bible is the statement that the husband "knew" his wife. This refers

to the sexual relationship yet there is so much more to this word than simply sex. To "know" carries with it the idea of knowing the other person emotionally, spiritually and intellectually.

The word underlines the very essence of what a relationship is all about – to know my wife for the person she truly is, see her more deeply than others see her and see what no one else sees: the beautiful person God created her to be.

Which is the way God sees me; the person I really am. So, what I learn through my relationship with God changes, for the good, the way I relate to my wife.

And the only way that I can truly know Karen well is to talk with her, listen to her, share with her, dream with her, cry with her and laugh with her.

I experience what God described as "oneness" in marriage.

This oneness does not happen overnight. When a couple is married, they begin a lifelong journey toward oneness and there will be the inevitable ups and downs along that journey.

But they don't travel that road alone. If they're both committed to God, He goes before them, encouraging, nurturing and shaping them into the people He wants them to be.

And the result is oneness – a true unity of body, mind, heart, and soul.

God can make a difference in your marriage – why not let Him start today?

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

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE]

** Please tick and write clearly **

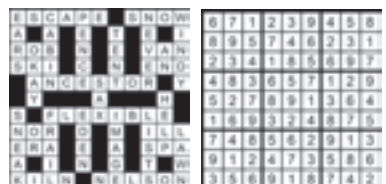
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Want to explore more?

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 THE DARK ABOUT DEATH?

BY PETER BRAIN

THERE are many humorous graveyard inscriptions. Recently I came across one that said, "Here lies my wife: here let her lie! Now she's at rest, and so am I." Another said, "I told you I was sick."

Humour is one way of handling death, which we all know is anything but funny. There are other ways of coping with death, and all the uncertainty and fear it engenders.

Some say there is nothing after death; what we see is all there is. Others rely on reincarnation as an explanation for death.

Still others trivialise the awfulness of death by saying that death is just a natural part of life. And others, that everyone will go to Heaven or that God will give us a second chance after we die.

It's all fairly confusing, and sad, don't you think? Especially since God would neither have us fearful nor living in the dark about death and eternity.

There are some who would say that the Christian faith is escapism – but what if, as Dr I. Howard Marshall writes, "it is the only ultimate realism"?

Now, to make a claim like that there must be some clear public domain evidence. Wonderfully, there is. Marshall reminds us that "it rests foursquare on the fact that Jesus has defeated death, and anybody who can defeat death can defeat anything"

The coming of Jesus into our world gives us a new way of looking at things.

He offers life eternal to all who trust Him now and will honour the choice of all who refuse Him with death eternal. There is no reincarnation or second chance. The choice of eternity hangs on the decision we make about Jesus now.

One man said that "at death I shall change my place, but not my company", and another that "death has been described as the old family servant who opens the door to welcome the children home."

For those trusting in Jesus, death holds no more fear than going to sleep at night. And it is all because of Jesus.

We see this confidence in John Newton, who gave us the hymn *Amazing Grace*, when he said to one of his visitors toward the end of his life, "I am like a person going on a journey in a stage coach, who expects its arrival every hour and is frequently looking out of the window for it." And the reason for his confidence was revealed by his friend who heard his final words, "My memory is nearly gone but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Saviour".

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 secured 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 his 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 ambience 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!

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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