

# I HIRED A HITMAN

Dave Harris' life has changed from the inside out.



BY JANICE TEO

**D**rug dealer, addict, crook and ex-convict Dave Harris realised something was wrong.

His dog, usually the first to greet him, didn't come to the door. Sprinting to the back of his house, he found his pet in a pool of blood — a man who had come to buy drugs had killed it with an axe.

Beside himself with rage, Dave grabbed an iron rod. He knew where this assault had come from; so he and some friends raced to the house to beat him up, but found nobody home.

Determined to get revenge, Dave devised a plan. They would hire a professional hitman to kill him.

Dave was born and raised in South

Australia. His parents divorced when he was young and he grew up living with his mum, grandma and sister.

The young man fell quickly into alcohol and street fighting by the time he was 15.

"Without a dad on the scene, I didn't really know who I was and I had all these feelings of rejection and abandonment," Dave tells the YouTube channel WhyJesus?

"I had a lot of pain inside but I didn't know how to articulate it so I went hard into partying and self-destruction. I used to drink everyone else under the table just to prove myself."

Things went from bad to worse as his drug use fuelled his criminal

behaviour. "I started running amok. More alcohol, more drugs, stealing cars and robbing people for money to buy more drugs."

Not surprisingly, he landed in prison for the first of many stays. After getting out of prison he moved into a house with some prison mates. Before he knew it, he was back dealing drugs.

It was while he was there that his dog was attacked, setting in motion the events that led to Dave hiring the hitman, named Bear.

The two men knew each other from prison, but Dave hardly recognised Bear when he showed up.

"In prison, this guy was as tough as nails. He was egotistical and proud and arrogant. Yet here he was

humble and gentle and kind."

Dave, already surprised by the new and improved Bear, became gobsmacked when his old jail mate began preaching to him about Jesus Christ.

"Mate," Dave blurted out "I called you here to kill someone for me, not to preach at me. You must be off your head."

"But I could see something really had happened to him on the inside — and the truth is that I'd been searching for a long time."

Dave had dabbled in the occult but stopped when he began hearing voices in his head, ultimately putting him in hospital after a suicide attempt. He and his friends had many occultic encounters, including

going into trances while under the control of spirits.

"I knew the spirit realm was real," he says. "I stayed at ashrams and got into meditation and Buddhism and I knew there had to be life after death."

He developed acute paranoia and was given electric shock treatment eight times. He had a chemical lobotomy, injections every week and heavy tranquilisers.

Then along came Bear with his transformed life. He invited Dave to go with him to New South Wales.

"No way!" said Dave that night. But overnight, although he couldn't explain it, he changed his mind.

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

**BACK PAGE**

**PARALYMPICS**  
FANIE VD MERWE

# Childhood abuse leaves long scars

**J**odi Davis was only five when she was sexually abused by a woman, an attack that left her emotionally scarred.

"My family didn't know anything about it," the Western Australian woman tells *Challenge News*.

"When your mind is corrupted at such a young age it becomes hard to know the difference between right and wrong. You can't tell what's good or evil and you don't know if you're Arthur or Martha."

This confusion led her to "a spiritually and morally dark place" and to becoming a distrustful and



to a man she met through a drug deal. Life predictably became riddled with drugs, alcohol and violence. Jodi and her husband fought a lot

very angry teenager.

Jodi was raised in a loving family but says she was "hateful" towards them. She hated school and became rebellious and "quite violent," getting into fights and even putting some people in hospital.

"I didn't know [that] the reason I was so angry was because I had been abused at such a young age," she says.

She got married at 19

too, though she admits she "can't really say my husband was a wife-basher because I bashed him too."

The couple had a son a year after getting married, but Jodi's parents didn't trust them to raise him and removed the baby from their care.

Jodi acknowledges she and her husband "were not safe to be around. Looking back I was very blessed to have my parents because my son could have gone to foster care. I'm thankful they stepped in."

At the time though, the young mother became so depressed at this turn of events that she decided to commit suicide.

"I thought 'what is the point of all this? Nobody wants me, everyone hates me.' I felt there was no hope."

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# I HIRED A HITMAN

• From page 1

Along the way the two men stopped for dinner at a friend of Bear's. After dinner they read the Bible. Dave had an instant response.

"I started shaking uncontrollably and retching. I think the demons in me couldn't handle the power of the Word of God.

"I knew then that this must be real and I got down on my knees and asked God to forgive me.

"I said 'Jesus I recognise that You died on the cross for my sin. Jesus, please forgive me. I want to follow You from now on.'

"I felt such peace. It was literally like Father God wrapped His arms around me. I had never felt love like that."

Yet Dave's subsequent journey was not so much straight and narrow as 'twisty and turny.'

After the death of his beloved grandmother he slid back into his old life, even ending up going on the run from the police for 10 months.

"I felt quite hopeless then. I knew I had encountered Jesus. I knew He was real, but I thought being a believer and follower were two different things.

"I believed I didn't have what it took to follow Jesus — I couldn't call myself a Christian."

He ended up in prison, where he took drugs every single day.

In prison, Dave met a chaplain who shared the gospel (the good news that Jesus died for our sins) with him. As



they spoke, Dave decided to give God another go. Warned by the chaplain that he would forfeit any chance of parole unless he attended the rehab program, Dave signed up.

The rehab program was held at a church so Dave attended the services as well. And it was there, he says, that God finally broke through.

He says he saw himself kneeling at the feet of God. He knelt at the front of the church, crying uncontrollably over his sin.

He finished the program and joined a church that embraced him with love and acceptance. It was there that he also met his wife, Helen.

Dave has been walking with Jesus for more than 30 years. He and Helen started their married life in business before planting a church eight years

later. They were senior pastors for 18 years. He has also written a book, titled *Certified*, which is available at certifiedthebook.com.

"I haven't looked back. There is no other way but Jesus. Other spiritual powers don't lead to Father God.

"When you know God as your Father, all those issues about identity and abandonment are sorted. It's not a religion; it's a personal relationship with a God who lives inside you and changes you from the inside out.

"If we come humbly to Him and surrender to Him, He will give us what we need to live. Only He

can satisfy every desire." Dave and Helen have recently started a new business, Lighthouse Tiny Homes, with a mission to help make housing affordable for people vulnerable to homelessness.

They also run Bendigo Healing Rooms and see many lives transformed by the love and power of Jesus.

The transformation Dave has lived through inspires many people that there is hope no matter how dark life seems. Jesus came to transform lives. Dave constantly encourages people to keep choosing life — the life Jesus offers.

# Childhood abuse leaves long scars

• From page 1

She planned to hang herself and decided she would do it in her husband's work shed so he would be the one to find her.

But as she was preparing herself the next morning, a friend paid her a surprising and tearful visit. She told Jodi a mutual friend had just committed suicide.

This news shook Jodi. "I didn't know it but I was in a very selfish place in my mind. I didn't think of anyone else.

"I thought committing suicide was the answer to my problems but I saw how devastated everyone was at this friend's death.

"A thought struck me — 'oh far out, he's never coming back.' I'd never thought of suicide as never coming back."

Suddenly a memory flashed in her mind. She saw herself as a little girl sitting at a desk. A woman in the room was singing the old Christian song *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands*.

This memory was of the only time she had been to church and she mumbled, "God if You're real and if You do have the whole world in Your hands there should be no problem for You to bring me a friend who can help me out of all my problems."

Jodi had not grown up in a Christian home. Her father was a bush man who believed in Aboriginal spirits.

A few weeks later, she got a job at a café run by a woman who invited Jodi to church.

Jodi hemmed and hawed for a few months. The strange peace she felt when she thought about church waged war with her desire to continue drinking and doing drugs.

“Unbelievably my life changed.”

To stop thinking about "this God stuff," she and her husband threw a bender of a party. Three bottles of rum later, a voice broke through her drunkenness and said to her: "Look at all these people. They are going to hell. You need to get up because we have work to do."

Jodi sobered up instantly. "I started crying and I cried for the next three hours."

The next morning her son, who by this time was two years old, asked her: "Mummy, what about Jesus?"

"That's when I knew I had to change my life because there was nothing else for me," Jodi shares. "This was the only way — to believe in Jesus Christ."

Jodi made a 180-degree turn. "Unbelievably my life changed. With Jesus' help I gave up drinking and drugs. I got my son back.

"God did some amazing things in my life." There was a cost to her life change though. Her husband walked out on her and they eventually divorced.

Her father kicked her out of the house for believing in the "white man's God." He resisted Jodi's attempts at sharing the gospel (the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to pay for our sins) for years, but just before he died he asked her to tell him about God.

Today Jodi's passions are foster care and going on mission trips.

"It sounds like my story but it's not. It's the story of Jesus Christ and how He saved me from my problems, my sinful life and the evil that I was doing. He changed it and made it beautiful.

"He wants to change your life too."

## How do we 'prove' love?

BY JODY BENNETT

**LOTS** of people say that **God loves you**. What do they mean by that? And is it true? The same people or others may say **I love God**. What do they mean by that? And how can we know whether that is true?

The only religions that claim that God is a God of love are Judaism and Christianity. They also believe in the same God and share a common Scripture (the Old Testament), although Christians believe that the promises in the OT were fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (detailed in the New Testament). For them the Bible is the standard by which everything is judged. How does the Bible define love? Well, in the original Greek language of the New Testament there are four different words for love.

Sexual love (eros), friendship love (philia), family love (storge), and perfect/holy love (agape). When we talk of God's love that is not a sentimental or sexual love, it is agape — a perfect, unearned, active love, not a feeling-centred sentimentality.

**How do we know that God loves us?** He demonstrated it by dying (as the God-Man Jesus Christ) on the cross for all our wrongdoings and rebellion, in order to make a way for us to be in relationship with Him. As the much-quoted verse John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whomsoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

**Does God love everyone equally?** Yes, in the sense that He has made a way for everyone to come to Him through Jesus. Does that mean that God loves what everyone does, doesn't expect them to change their behaviour or that He will love

them forever and not throw them into hell for their sin? No. The term "unconditional love" gets bandied about but it is not Biblical. God's love is *unearned* but unless it is responded to, it will someday be superseded by God's hatred and wrath for sin. If you don't believe me, just read through the books of Psalms and Proverbs and see how many times it talks about God hating or abhorring the wicked.

**And how do we know that we love God?** Well the Bible is clear about that too. "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.'" (John 14:23-24) If we love God, we obey Him. Obey Him how?

Jesus said that all the many laws of the OT were summed up in the greatest commandment — to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and to love others as yourself.

Loving God and doing what He said are vitally linked together. True love is shown by our actions, not in feelings and words. Love does. A cheating or abusive husband may say he still loves his wife, but she won't feel loved, and he is not doing to her what he would like her to do to him. That is not love.

A person who claims to love God and yet is selfish, bitter, immoral and rude, is showing by their actions that they don't in fact love God. It doesn't matter what they say or think they feel.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 — "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

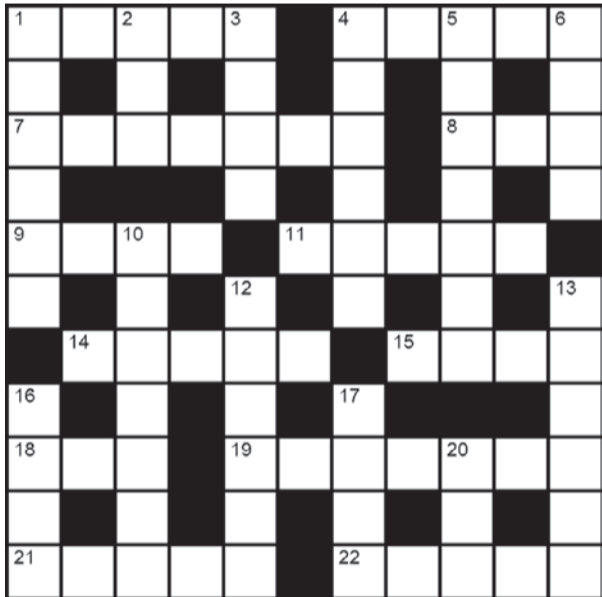
## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

**ACROSS**

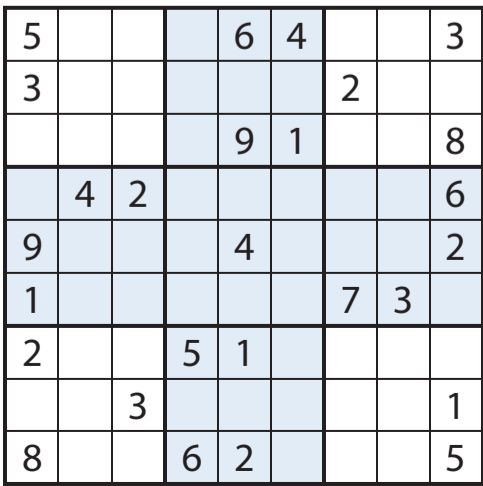
- 1. Shoe size factor
- 4. Maintain a subscription
- 7. Sickly pale
- 8. Pole for an angler
- 9. Sax relative
- 11. Tendon
- 14. Sarcastic sort, scoffer
- 15. Keyboarder's goof
- 18. Once around the track
- 19. What's left
- 21. Large fire
- 22. Hostile force

**DOWN**

- 1. Implement of combat
- 2. Paternity identifier
- 3. Cannabis fibre
- 4. Shrink, as from a snake?
- 5. Infant's room
- 6. The whole world
- 10. Original Olympics site
- 12. Ferocious, savage
- 13. Tragedy's opposite
- 16. Spill the beans
- 17. Land at sea
- 20. Food colouring



SOLUTIONS PAGE 11





# I am no longer a product of my past

BY MARK ELLIS

**A**t 16 Mike Cain suffered a near-fatal car accident. “I broke my back, my neck, and lost teeth. The worst is that I broke my skull and had a traumatic brain injury. I was in chronic pain for two years and had a migraine headache that never went away.”

He couldn’t attend school or be involved in sports.

On a spiritual plane, it confirmed that his father’s strong atheistic beliefs were right. “I thought if this could happen to me there can’t be a God, there’s just no way.

“I didn’t want to be alive anymore and hung out with the lost,” Mike tells a gathering at Rock Harbor Church in Mission Viejo, California. “I never heard about God, never knew Jesus, never went to a Christian service.”

Soon Mike got in trouble with drugs and alcohol, which reached a crisis when he was 20 and got two drink driving charges against him. Rather than go to jail, he chose a reform program.

Five years after his accident, Mike started feeling better physically and mentally. He enrolled in college and got a degree in biology and eventually a doctorate.

He married, had two kids and landed a great job. “My pride was at an all-time high. It was all me. I had an answer for everything. I could out-will anything. I didn’t need anybody or anything.”

Mike’s high self-opinion was not shared by everyone. His wife divorced him and he lost his job.

He struggled with suicidal feelings, but kept pushing himself forward because of his two children.

He wondered, “Is this all there is to life?”

Then Mike met a Christian woman named Ashly who “had a kind of grace and peace I couldn’t put my finger on.”

He began to share openly about his turbulent past because he wanted an honest foundation for their relationship. “I thought this was the last conversation I was going to have with her because she would run away,” he said.

“I told her everything I ever did, about my problems with the law, problems with my marriage, and my faults.”

She shocked him when she didn’t run. Instead, she said, “If Christ can

forgive me for what I’ve done, how can I not forgive you?”

Mike didn’t know how to process her statement. “It didn’t make any sense to me, because our past defines who we are.” Or so he thought.

Mike went to church with Ashly for the first time in his life. “It was weird. They sang weird songs and I didn’t know the words. I thought everybody was looking at me.”

The pastor’s message struck Mike to his core. He felt so convicted of his sin.

Mike left the service, got into his car, and broke down sobbing for half an hour. He looked back at his life and could see God had been with him the entire time. “He was there in the hard times, the very difficult times, trying to reach me through people and events but I wouldn’t hear it.”

Mike momentarily felt guilty, but then he was surprised by the audible voice of God: “That’s not from Me. I don’t want you to feel guilty. I’ve always loved you. I’ve been trying to reach you, but you couldn’t hear Me. Your pride was getting in the way.”

Suddenly, everything in Mike’s world looked different. “That whole next week I was walking around looking at people and nature and thinking, ‘This was here the whole time and I didn’t see it?’ It was like an awakening.”

The next week Mike attended church for the second time and Pastor Chad did something very unexpected. He stopped abruptly and said, “Someone has to accept Christ right now.”

Mike immediately stood up. “I had to make a choice. I said yes.”

Because he said yes to Jesus as his Saviour and Lord, Mike’s life has been transformed. “Nothing has been the same since then. I realised I wasn’t a mistake, some evolutionary by-product. I had a purpose. I was made for a reason!

“I was home. It didn’t mean everything was going to be easy. This past year I’ve lost my career. We’ve been on welfare. We’ve had to have food from food kitchens in the area and help from friends. In the past I would have been lost, but I’m not lost anymore, because I’m found in Jesus.

“He tells me who I am. He tells me I have worth. He tells me I’m important and I’m not a product of my past. He is not going to judge me. He’s going to guide me.”



Missionary doctor Malcolm Dunjey.

# A LIFE OF PURPOSE

BY JANICE TEO

**F**or many of us, the worst part of getting to the office in the morning involves fighting traffic.

Spare a thought then for Dr Malcolm Dunjey, for whom getting to the office in the 1970s in post-war Bangladesh meant avoiding dead bodies in the street.

Malcolm, who died aged 88 in September this year, worked there just after the war between India and Pakistan.

“The country was in ruins,” he told *Challenge News* in 2021.

“There were dead bodies in the street, widows sitting next to their dead husbands begging for money for burial clothes. At night a cart would go through the city and pick up the dead.”

Before that Malcolm had been a senior medical officer at the top teaching hospital in Perth. He had four children. The family was well off and settled.

Then one night they attended a church meeting at which they heard of the great need for missionaries in Bangladesh.

Something stirred in Malcolm’s heart, a desire that had been with him from the time he committed his life to Jesus Christ as a teenager before it was drowned out by life’s other demands.

It was the desire to go to a foreign land and share the love and message of Jesus with others.

Malcolm had been raised in a stable, loving home.

He had attended Sunday school but said he had only a passing knowledge of the gospel (the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins) until he was approached by a group called Campaigners for Christ

when he was 16.

“They told me the gospel in a way that actually resonated with me - it was like someone joined all the dots from my childhood,” he recalled. “The knowledge that Jesus died for my sins was revolutionary for me. I decided that I wanted Him in my life and dedicated myself to Him.”

His life filled up with church activities. “I was captivated; I went through a total transformation.”

His parents, however, were not thrilled. They worried that their son, who at the time was a technician-in-training, was going to become a religious nut.

“They thought I’d gone completely over the top,” Malcolm chuckled.

“But they were reassured when I finished my studies. They also saw a change in me - I didn’t run with work-mates drinking or womanising.”

Ultimately, beginning with his mother, his whole family became Christians.

Malcolm wanted to be a missionary right from the start. But he shelved that dream when, at 25 and already married with one child, he decided to study medicine.

“Time trundled on and by the time I was at that meeting about Bangladesh I was already 40,” he said. At the meeting the old desire to be a missionary was rekindled powerfully.

“The effect on me was electrifying; I felt the hand of God reaching across the intervening 20 years,” he wrote in *To the City of the Great King*, one of four books he authored.

But uprooting at this time would be a huge upheaval - and would his wife Audrey agree?

“In fear and trembling I told her

I wanted to go.” Her answer astonished him. “Me too,” she said.

The couple sold their house and, most wrenching of all, sent their three children to boarding schools in three different countries - Australia, India and Pakistan. The youngest went with them.

The memory of the separation from his children still brought him to tears and he stepped away from the interview briefly to compose himself.

The couple served for two years in Bangladesh, then came back to Perth. There would be two more mission trips - to Yemen and then to Pakistan. In all, Malcolm and Audrey were full-time missionaries for 10 years.

Asked if he saw many converts, he said: “All my trips were to Muslim countries and you don’t see happy photographs of converts in Muslim countries for obvious reasons.

“I see my work as having been preparatory. As executive director I planned projects in different parts of the country and spoke to mission groups in other countries. I travelled to Europe to raise funds and personnel. I hope I helped lay the groundwork for more mission trips.”

He shared that for him, faith and service were intertwined.

“There were sacrifices, but the reward for Audrey and myself is that we always felt we were right in the centre of God’s will. We feel we have been blessed a hundredfold.

“I now live with such a heightened sense of God’s presence, of God here, with us.”

Malcolm’s last book, titled *Stethoscopes, Kiaps and the Law of the Jungle*, traces his six years as PNG’s District Medical Officer, where he accompanied jungle patrols deep into cannibal country offering medical assistance.

All books are available from his website [www.malcolmdunjey.com](http://www.malcolmdunjey.com) and from Amazon.

## HOLY SPIRIT CAR WASH

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



www.joyfultoons.com © 2008 Michael D. Waters

... but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour. — TITUS 3:5-6 NIV



# FROM ADVERSITY TO ACHIEVEMENT

The man who recently threw his hat into the ring to be the next President of Singapore was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth; in fact he was lucky to have had any spoon placed in his mouth at all.

George Goh, 63, grew up in poverty so acute his parents could not afford to keep two of his sisters and gave them away.

A sibling died at four weeks because there was no money for medical help.

“Our family basically had no money,” he tells the Salt&Light channel on YouTube. “We hardly ate good food. None of us got an education beyond secondary school.” When

he was 16, George dropped out of school, left his hometown in Malaysia and found work as a sweeper in a shoe factory in Singapore, where he worked for seven years.

Near the factory was a church. Youth from the church would visit the factory with their guitars and sing hymns.

The music touched George deeply. “I couldn’t read the lyrics, but I loved the hymns.” He knew nothing about church at that time. “Our village didn’t have a church; we knew nothing about God so when the youth invited me to church I thought ‘why not?’”

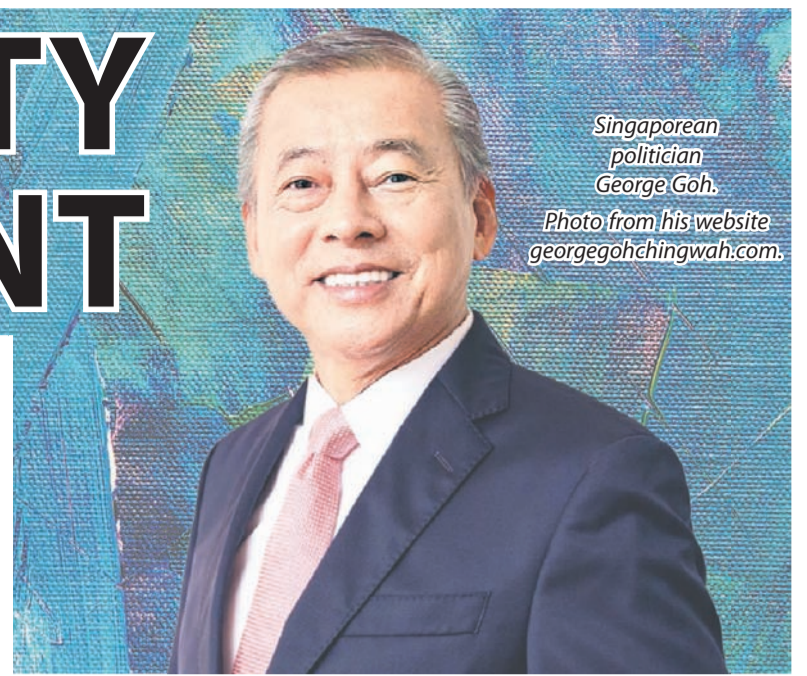
George recalls feeling extremely self-conscious at his first service.

“I found it nerve-racking because I couldn’t speak much English. The people were different. They could sing, play the piano. The language sounded beautiful to us.”

In 1978 the American evangelist Billy Graham held a crusade in Singapore. Nearly 20,000 people committed their lives to Christ.

Among them was 18-year-old George, who drank in the gospel message (the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to save man from sin and give him eternal life).

“I sat there in the stands, and finally, I made up my mind. I would believe in Jesus,” he says. He told his father: “Papa, I’ve been going to this little church. It is very beautiful,



Singaporean politician George Goh.

Photo from his website [georgegohchingwah.com](http://georgegohchingwah.com).

ful, I like it. I may not understand it completely, but I want to accept Jesus Christ as my Saviour.”

His father flew into a rage. “He screamed and scolded me but I said, ‘No, I will go ahead and be baptised,’ so in 1978, I got baptised in the church.” George has never regretted his decision to follow Christ, and says his faith has been the anchor through many a business storm.

The humble sweeper turned out to have natural business acumen. At 22, using his savings and a loan from his sister, he started his own business.

Today he owns a \$48 million investment holding company and is a philanthropist and youth mentor.

He was also Singapore’s Ambassador to Morocco until June 2023, when he resigned the post to contest the presidential election.

This business success, he says, has come as a result of his reliance on God. “One person I admire in the Bible is King Solomon. He could have asked the Lord for anything, but he asked for wisdom (1 Kings 3:9).”

Taking a leaf from Solomon’s book, George prayed in the early days of his career: “Lord, I’m from humble beginnings. How can I run my organisation? Lord, give me wisdom, give me direction; please give me the wisdom of King Solomon.”

“I didn’t understand anything about capital market listings or mergers. The only way I could get anything done was to pray.

“In my 41 years of work, I’ve gone through eight crises... including the Asian Financial Crisis, Lehman Brothers, SARS, Covid-19. “So if you’re a Christian, remember to pray. It’s a very important principle. It is the only way for us to overcome such challenges,” he advises.

He also honours Sunday as the

Lord’s Day and does not open any of his stores or factories.

“Worship is very important. We don’t work on Sundays. The rest of the days, we work 16 hours, 18 hours – no issue – but we are quite clear that we don’t work on Sundays.

“And no matter how hard I work I will find time to serve in the church. We need a balance between work and serving.”

George has been singing in his church choir for the past 40 years, going so far as to obtain his diploma in opera when he turned 62.

In 2015, he and his wife Lysa set up the Border Mission Charitable Foundation, whose purpose is to better the lives of the poor in Singapore and in the Himalayas.

“Missions are a key aspect in my life. I set up my life in three pillars. The first is my family, the second is my business, third is my mission field,” he states.

He has travelled to dangerous and remote areas in the Himalayas more than 20 times, accepting the risks stoically.

George has told his wife: “If there’s a day when I do not return home, you’ll have to accept it.”

“The Himalayas are unreached – somebody has to go. The Lord says the gospel must reach the ends of the world!”

Unfortunately, George’s tilt at the presidency ended even before election day on September 1, 2023 as he failed to meet some of Singapore’s eligibility criteria.

Though disappointed, he says he is happy to “have made history in Singapore as an individual from the private sector and an independent candidate. The torch will be carried to the next person.”

• Salt&Light Channel, a Singapore-based platform for digital outreach and discipleship on faith@work and other Kingdom issues, on YouTube.

## Waking up from ‘woke’

Rejecting her Southern Baptist upbringing, Keri Smith became the very definition of a social justice warrior (SJW), believing that she was working to end racism and oppression and sexism; but it turned her into an upholder of, and offender in, all those very things. Only 20 years later did she start finding a way to really make a difference in the world.

Keri was exposed to woke thinking (slang for awoken to society’s popular leftist issues) during her years at Duke University. Particularly through her women’s studies courses Keri was educated in critical race theory (CRT), queer theory and social justice, which she thought was just progressivism.

She says, “There I learnt the definition ‘racism (or sexism) equals prejudice plus power’ and that started changing the way I thought about everything.”

When Keri left college she took this belief system into her career in entertainment and, for 20 years, was really a promoter for all things woke: through the comedy specials she produced, on online message boards and chat rooms she posted on, and even through rewriting Wikipedia entries.

However, cancel culture (bullying and ostracising people with unpopular beliefs online) gave Keri a reason to question this so-called ‘tolerant’ ideology. She was also appalled by people being beaten bloody for their right wing political beliefs.

Then there was a shooting at a Black Lives Matter (BLM) rally in Texas of police officers by a black sniper and some in Keri’s SJW circle said things like “Well, some old white guys are going to have to die.” The condoning of these murders bothered Keri greatly.

She also started listening to Jordan Peterson online and found his arguments against compelled speech made a lot of sense. His videos helped her to work through the internal conflicts she was having.

Keri now believes woke culture is a cult, where one stops thinking for oneself and just repeats the approved mantras. “I had all these opinions about things that I had never actually researched or done the work to understand,” she realises now. Keri admits that although at the time she appeared very confident about her beliefs, she had a lot of anxiety and inner conflict. Deep down she knew she couldn’t defend her opinions.

Now out of the SJW movement, Keri says, “I have so much freedom now. I was making six figures in entertainment pushing woke and now I am making nothing like that but I’m able to say what I like. I can be myself. I



Keri Smith Photo: Twitter

can think what I want and I can laugh at things without looking around to see who else is laughing too. I would never go back, not for anything.”

Having left the woke belief system, Keri went looking for a new worldview. She joined a spiritual centre. “I was questioning everything about myself, the world and my belief system,” she explains to American philosopher Peter Boghossian in an interview.

She then tried different churches. “I was looking for truth,” she says. “Woke says I am white, I am cis, I am straight. It is such a terrible

thing to reduce a human being to that. I wanted to know who I really was and my identity. Then I found my church and the pastor is amazing – he is like Jordan Peterson meets CS Lewis\*.”

“[At one service] grace (God’s undeserved favour) and love washed over me there; an experience hard to put into words. A mix of joy and understanding – a knowing in your gut. Unworthiness made worthy,” Keri shares on her substack. “It is so different from my understanding of Christianity from when I was a kid. Christianity is more than a belief system, it is also a behaviour system. It helps me to be the better version of myself and lean away from the worst version.

“If you look at the way Jesus said to live it is common sense stuff like ‘don’t lie.’ When I started reading the Bible – I was so prejudiced, I thought I knew what Christianity was about and had rejected it – but it made so much sense. I believe it not only because it is useful but because I believe it is true.

“In woke there is no redemption, nothing for you when you go through hard times, no grace, no absolution, no forgiveness. Nothing to trust in.

“I discovered the power of prayer when I was going through hard times. I can’t explain faith but I quit drinking three years ago. I gave up sex before marriage. I gave up smoking. I never thought I would.”

On June 4, 2023 Keri wrote on Instagram: “I got baptised two years ago today. I think of this day as a second birthday of sorts... when you come to God later in life – the difference in you is noticeable to anyone who knows you. You couldn’t hide it if you tried to do so, not really. And it’s not you, even. It’s God. My behaviour changed; my thoughts changed; my priorities changed; my level of anxiety and contentment both changed; even my countenance changed. All for the better. All for the good. I reread the words I wrote on this day two years ago, and thought I’d share them here... ‘Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below.’”

• \*See The Church on the Square on YouTube

“The only way I could get anything done was to pray.”

“I have so much freedom now”



George Goh and his family. Photo: from his website.



# Genesis and the Ice Age

An 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



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

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

“I became a Christian at 18 years old when I realised 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



Dr Michael Oard

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 favoured 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.”

This article is from *Creation magazine* and is used with kind permission.

“**To have an ice age ... you need a way to get lots of water out of the ocean up on to the land.**”

## Diamonds’ evidence is crystal clear

PETER’S CORNER

**DID** you know that scientists from the University of Lorraine (in Nancy, France) have found a way to measure the composition of the earth’s ancient atmosphere — and they found it to be the same as today’s?

They analysed tiny gas bubbles inside diamonds that were said to be 2,700,000,000 years old. They heated the diamonds to 2000°C turning them into graphite. They analysed the volatile gases driven off.

These gases were absorbed from the atmosphere during the formation of the diamonds. Since diamonds have a very tight molecular lattice structure, they are excellent miniature “time capsules” for locking up the gases unchanged for all that alleged time.

It turned out that the early

atmosphere was very like it is today, with much oxygen to support life as we know it. The lead researcher said that this was a surprising result.

Why was it a surprise?

Secular researchers suppose that life started by accident long ago, when special organic molecules somehow combined together to form the first life. However, oxygen is fatal to those organic molecules. Oxygen rapidly combines with them chemically and destroys them.

To solve this oxygen problem, those researchers claim that the early atmosphere must have had no oxygen. They say that evolution eventually made plants that can emit oxygen, and the atmosphere composition gradually changed to what it is today.

But this new finding shows

that theory was wrong.

The early atmosphere had plenty of oxygen right from the start, which is bad news — fatal news — for those organic molecules.

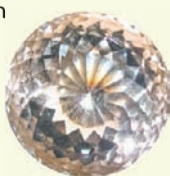
However the news about the atmosphere is no surprise in light of the creation account in the Bible book of Genesis. The earth was created to be inhabited, and the plants and animals and all creatures were able to breathe good air right from the start.

I hope these words help you in your journey to surely trust the Bible and the Creator, as much as they helped me.

Massey, N. Diamonds are the jewel of life — and really are forever: study. Perthnow.com.au, 6 July 2021.

Earth’s early atmosphere — same as today’s. *Creation* 43(4) 2021, p11.

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



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

## Amazing design in dandelions



**IF** you were hoping that there might be a way to slow down the spread of pesky dandelions in your garden, bad news.

Using high-speed cameras and wind tunnels, researchers from the University of Edinburgh have discovered that the familiar fluffy parachute of a dandelion seed, called a pappus, is designed to keep it airborne and afloat for as long as possible.

The parachute is made of a ring of bristles that creates a pocket of air, which provides stability by rotating as the seed falls. The seeds also take advantage of a phenomenon known as ‘vortex shedding’ to create lift that helps keep them on the wing.

The researchers created a mathematical model that accurately simulated the flight of dandelion seeds and found that they can travel up to eight kilometres.

While bad news for gardeners, these naturally-occurring features could have practical applications in the development of new drones, or parachutes that can stay aloft for longer periods of time.

In fact, University of Manchester researchers have already created a drone inspired by dandelion seeds. It weighs less than a gram, can be dropped from heights of up to 30 metres, and can stay in the air for up to five minutes.

Such clever engineering is inspired by the even more amazing divine design seen in the humble dandelion seed.

Reference

Wu, K., The uplifting science of how dandelion seeds stay aloft, pbs.org, 3 Jul 2019.

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# YOUTH TRUTH

## YOUTUBER'S FAITH PUT TO THE TEST

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She said she felt broken, and Tyler



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

admitted that he wasn't prioritising her at this time. "Christ wasn't first in our marriage, Dude Perfect was," Bethany admits.

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

2020, they had son Rhett. Having three kids under five and basically parenting alone because her husband was away so much enjoying "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunities, eventually became too much for Bethany.

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

Then Covid hit and the pair separated for a while.

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

"It has been irreplaceable in my [spiritual] walk to have those 11 guys to be vulnerable with, be humble and share wins and losses and all of those things together," Tyler says.

He also talks about the importance

of "getting in the Word of God [reading the Bible] and showing up at church. "One of my mentors said that most young men can handle anything except prolonged, sustained success, and I fell victim to that. I got really dependent on myself and my ability to control a situation," he admits.

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

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

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

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

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



## I trust the Author with my story

**S**inger Katy Nichole released her debut single in January 2022, but before that, it had already racked up tens of millions of views on TikTok and Instagram.

The song was inspired by her experience growing up with congenital scoliosis, a rare form of curvature of the spine.

"That was kind of scary in the very beginning, because doctors were like, 'She might not be able to walk, she might not be able to do the things that the other kids are doing,'" she says in an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN). Admitting she is stubborn and strong by nature, Katy had to draw on that strength when she was 15 and underwent surgery to put metal rods and screws into her spine to straighten it.

But the procedure took a toll on her physically and emotionally, leaving her in intense pain, depressed and anxious.

"I didn't really see a point in being here anymore," she admits. "I genuinely felt as though I was a waste of space in every room that I walked into."

Katy shares in an interview with K-Love Christian radio station that she considered taking her own life.

"I picked up a bottle of pills on my dresser, and I looked at it and I said, 'It would be that easy,'" she says. "But that bottle of pills fell out of my hand, and I just felt the Lord say, 'I'm not done yet'."

Her doctors eventually decided to remove the rods and screws. When she woke up from the surgery, she saw an incredible bright light despite being in a windowless room.

"I looked up and I saw the light again for the first time," Katy says. "It was as if I was meeting Jesus for the first time. I know that's kind of crazy because I've known Jesus

my whole life ... but I just knew that His presence was all over that room."

Katy says she left her surgery with desire to live for God completely. The experience led her to write *In Jesus' Name (God of Possible)*, hoping she would be able to inspire just one person. Having experienced hopelessness in her own life, she wanted others to know they were not alone. She posted a clip on TikTok and it immediately went viral. In only a few hours it had racked up one million views.

Then in January 2022, Katy officially released *In Jesus' Name*. It went on to hit number one on Billboard's Hot Christian Songs chart and the Christian Airplay chart in only 12 weeks – the quickest trip to number one in the chart's 20-year history. The song was also nominated for Pop/Contemporary Recorded Song of the Year at the 2022 GMA Dove Awards.

"I'm really just trying to encourage people that there's a path that can lead you to peace and redemption and so many great and wonderful things," Katy says. "I can't express that enough. When you are finally out of that pit that you're in, you're actually gonna be able to look back on your life and see how God's handprint was just on every moment. For me, that's what I saw. I saw how God had actually just been with me in those moments and brought some form of peace, because if He hadn't, I definitely wouldn't be here today."

Katy tells website JubileeCast, "There's no story that doesn't matter to God. Every story was written by Him, and He's the greatest author of all time. God's healed me, so I know He can heal someone else. I'm going to share my story and hope it will encourage others to go and share theirs." •

### Tyler's message on tour is something like this:

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

"The beauty of Christianity and the beauty of what we believe is that you are not valued by how much money you have, you're not defined by your experiences, or the things that you've accomplished, and most importantly you are not defined by your mistakes and your flaws. We might be called Dude Perfect but I am a very flawed and

selfish and prideful individual and the only thing perfect about us is the Lord Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Becoming a dad is the closest I have got to experience what God's love for us is like. When my wife fell pregnant with our son, I had all these hopes and dreams for him – that he would be six foot tall, and like hunting and fishing like me, enjoy sports etc – but when he was born the only thing that mattered was the immense love I had for that little boy, not because of what he would be or what he will do, but just because he is mine. That is how God loves you. You can't earn that love, you can't outrun it, and all you have to do is accept it."

### Contact Challenge!

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# YOUTH TRUTH

## My eating disorder vanished

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

Decidedly “100 percent atheist,” Mariah Jones pitied Christians, believing they rejected reason and the advancements of scientific knowledge.

“I did not believe in God,” Mariah says on a 2019 video on her YouTube channel. “I didn’t believe in spirituality at all. I thought believing in such things was silly. Basically I was just a strong believer in science.”

Right after high school, Mariah joined the Navy in 2013. It was in the Navy that she developed anorexia and bulimia.

“It grew more and more aggressive as the years went by,” she says.

Once out of the Navy, she enrolled in college, and she positively relished the science classes which at first affirmed her belief in nothing.

“I used to enjoy when people would bring up God so that I could try and destroy their argument with science,” she admits. “I would ask them impossible questions that would put them in this awkward position and make it pretty much impossible for them to answer.”

“I hated when people would talk about Jesus... My mentality towards Christians and anyone who was religious was like, ‘You’re wasting your entire life trying to live by these impossible standards and these rules that supposedly God created just to go to a place after you die,’” she says.

However, in 2017 in her second year in college, the same science that the year before had affirmed her atheism, now, with more advanced



Mariah Jones battled anorexia and bulimia before a life-changing encounter in 2017.

classes, caused her to question it.

Specifically, how could biological molecules with an astronomical number of atoms all sequenced with confounding minute precision have just come together by chance? she wondered.

“Having to accept that everything just formed on its own by itself by accident, it didn’t make sense to me,” Mariah admits. “It really started to bother me because deep down I didn’t want to believe something. I didn’t want to take that responsibility.”

Mariah stayed after class and questioned professors looking for logical answers.

“What came first, was it

the blood or was it the heart that pumped the blood?” she quizzed them. “Was it the skin that held it all together or the organs inside the skin? How did nothing turn into something? How did nothing result in intelligent life? How did

an explosion result in living breathing loving unique beings?”

The professors were of no help with these befuddling questions. So, her mind wandered to the obvious: there had to be an outside agent guiding the

process, an external agent with a purpose from another dimension.

Her progression bugged her. She had always felt sorry for those who saw the need to believe in God. But now science was leading her towards Him.

“Eventually I recognised my biases and I knew that I was being closed-minded towards the alternative which was God,” she says.

As she pondered what she had vowed never to do, she prayed to God.

“I refused to call it a prayer at this time,” she recalls. “But I basically said, ‘God if You’re real and You really exist, would You not want me to know You? Would You want me to wonder forever about if You exist? I don’t want to be disrespectful to You. But if You’re there, I want You to give me a sign and I’ll believe.’”

Immediately ... nothing happened. To be truthful, Mariah felt embarrassed and dumb.

But as the next six months unwound, things happened: vivid dreams that reflected Bible verses and scary events

rattled her.

Mariah was disinclined towards Christianity. So she searched every other religion: Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism, you name it, she researched it.

Finally, she looked into the character of Jesus in the Bible, and what she saw startled her.

“I started studying the Bible and learning about Jesus and the meaning of His life and death and what He claimed His purpose was,” Mariah says. “I ended up finding out that His purpose was essentially for me.”

Then in December 2017, her battles with anorexia and bulimia came to a head.

“I was trapped in this violent cycle that would never end, never, no matter what I did, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t break out of it,” she admits.

“I remember being in the bathroom. I was in the bathtub and I was throwing up. I remember feeling like, How long will I keep doing this? I felt so enslaved by this disease, this addiction.”

As the water was running, she broke down crying for the first time.

Without any forethought, she cried out: “Jesus, please help me.” This time the response was immediate.

“I can’t explain the feeling what it was. It was love. Someone loved me. I felt stillness, peace,” she explains.

“Within seconds the crying stopped, not on my own. Something had come over my entire being. There are no words. The entire room was filled with Jesus.”

The anorexia and bulimia simply disappeared from her life.

“I felt healed,” she says. “It felt almost like I never had an addiction to begin with. This darkness, this heaviness that was over me for four years, gone completely. I went to bed that night shocked – in a good way. I just could not believe what happened to me. I still can’t fathom what He did to me.”

A few days later, she received Jesus Christ into her life.

Initially, Mariah was reluctant to share her testimony online because she feared blowback from her atheist friends.

“I know what I’m going to face. I know people will probably make fun of me. I’ve accepted it,” Mariah says.

“I know who I used to be. I would have laughed at me. But I don’t care. I will never forget what Jesus did for me. I will always be in His debt. This is just a small, small portion of my gratitude for what He did for me.”

## Why is life so hard?

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

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

So, WHY do bad things happen?

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

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

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

Remember the story of Adam and Eve? They ate the “forbidden fruit.” That fruit was the idea that they could ignore what God said or gave them, and strike out on life apart from God. For Adam and Eve sort of hoped that they could become like God, without God.

They believed there was something more valuable in existence than God Himself, something more valuable than having a personal relationship with God. And this world system – with all of its faults – came as a result of the choice they made.

Their story is the story of all of us, isn’t it? Who hasn’t said – if not audibly at least in their hearts – “God, I think I can do this without you. I’ll just go this one alone. But thanks for the offer.”

We’ve all tried to make life work without God.

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

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

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

What’s God view on all of this?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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“ I felt stillness, peace. ”

“ This isn’t how life’s supposed to be! ”



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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## What makes a good friend?

BY ROB FURLONG

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

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

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

What makes a good friend?

**A good friend provides you with connection.**

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

Good friends share freely with each other, keep each other accountable and provide each other with honest feedback.

A good friend of mine said to me recently, “I don’t want you to validate me Rob, I want you to be truthful with me.” And I was, as he has been with me over the years.

Friendship like this keeps both people “sharp” by providing different perspectives, fresh ways of looking at things and a deep sense of connectedness that endures a lifetime.

**A good friend provides you with comradeship.**

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

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



I'll be there for you. Stock photo

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

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

Friends who walk with each other through their times of adversity develop a lasting comradeship – the sense that they are in this together and irrespective of the outcome, they’ll see it through with you to the end.

**A good friend provides you with community.**

One of the devastating aspects of loneliness is the feeling of a “lack of belonging” but good friends create a

community where people are free to be themselves and are genuinely celebrated. There is a sense of being part of a family or as Solomon described it, being with “friends who stick closer than brothers or sisters.”

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

“No one is in a hurry.

There’s no pressure to make something happen. People are not burdened by expectations of dress, correctness of opinion, or responsibilities for various programs. They just like being together. They really care about each other. No one is in a hurry to get somewhere else. They just... linger. It is a collection of people who think it’s all right just to linger without always having to measure things in terms of results.”

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

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

Who can you provide with connection, comradeship, or community today?

## 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 \*

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Challenge Literature Fellowship, PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985  
 info@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

## Bible verses for difficult times



■ *I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.*  
 — Psalm 121:1-2

■ *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*  
 — Isaiah 41:10

■ *But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*  
 — Isaiah 40:31

■ *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*  
 — Philippians 4:13

■ *The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul.*  
 — Psalm 23:1-3

■ *Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken.*  
 — Psalm 55:22

■ *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*  
 — Joshua 1:9

■ *The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles.*  
 — Psalm 34:17

■ *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*  
 — Psalm 46:1

■ *The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.*  
 — Psalm 145:18

■ *I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.*  
 — Psalm 34:4

■ *Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.*  
 — Psalm 31:24

■ *The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid?*  
 — Psalm 27:1

■ *I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.*  
 — Jeremiah 31:25

■ *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*  
 — Psalm 23:4

■ *He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.*  
 — Isaiah 40:29

■ *Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord Himself, is my strength and my defense; He has become my salvation.*  
 — Isaiah 12:2

■ *But You, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.*  
 — Psalm 22:19

■ *The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.*  
 — Proverbs 18:10

Photo: Judy Merrill-Smith

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## Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, Christian online resources:

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





Fanie van der Merwe of South Africa (centre) crosses the line to win gold ahead of silver medalist Charl du Toit of South Africa (left) in the Men's T37 100 metres final at Hampden Park during day five of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. (Photo by Cameron Spencer/Getty Images)

Fanie with the gold medal for the 100m T37 Mens event. (Photo by Julian Finney/Getty Images)

# DESPITE DISABILITY

Very few people get to compete in one Olympics but South African Fanie van der Merwe has been to three. He won double gold at his debut at the Beijing Summer Paralympics in 2008, in the 100m and 200m sprint. And went on to win gold again at London in 2012 for the 100m and bronze at the 2016 Rio Games. He also won gold at the All-Africa Games in 2011 and 2015, and at the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

Growing up, Fanie had tried all sorts of sports and had big expectations but found it difficult and disappointing with his cerebral palsy, so he realised that he probably would never excel. However, he decided he would compete because he loved it and not care too much if he didn't get anywhere.

"That was so crazy for me. When I had that attitude, God came and He turned what I thought of as my disability and something that is holding me back, God turned it around into a blessing," Fanie told Christians in Sport.

Of his cerebral palsy, Fanie says "I knew as a child that there was something wrong with me but I never saw it as a disability." He had always competed with able-bodied children up until grade 11 (aged 17), when he finally made the school's able-bodied athletic team. Then his coach suggested that he compete in para athletics.

Fanie saw this new opportunity as a beautiful gift from God and from

there a lot of doors opened for him. He began competing in disabled sports in 2003, in 2004 he competed in his first national championships. Being considered for the 2004 Athens games inspired him to try harder. In 2006, he began studying at Stellenbosch University, where he began training in earnest to compete in Beijing in 2008.

There he won his first two gold medals. "I almost got anxiety just thinking about the race and then when I went out onto the track I had peace. God pushed the anxiety away and I could really relax," he says.

As a young boy, Fanie wanted to be a child of God but didn't know how to do that. He thought maybe if he could just live a good life God would accept him, but he kept failing in his own strength. He also had spiritual pride, he confesses, in that he would look at others and think "well at least I'm not that bad" or "at least I'm not doing that".

"Even when I had opportunities to give my life to the Lord, I was never sure [it had worked], until I was about 16-17, I remember, telling someone that I don't know why but I always feel like I need to commit my life to the Lord at every opportunity. He told me it is not about your works, it is about what Christ

has done for you on the cross, and it is His blood that sets you free and gives you salvation. And I knew then I don't have to ever [try to] earn my salvation again, it is what God has done for me.

"That was the first step of the salvation process but although I didn't doubt anymore, no one really showed me how to walk with Christ.

"Then when I went to university I got disciplined, where someone took the responsibility to mentor me and explain to me that God's love disciplines us.

"That changed a lot of my understanding about Christianity and God as a father," Fanie says. He said when people corrected him, he could not see it as loving behaviour. Now he realised that God's correcting discipline was an act of love, wanting the best for him.

From the Bible passage in Hebrews 12:6 (... the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastens everyone He accepts as His son) Fanie realised in fact that the discipline he was feeling was proof that he was in fact God's son, not evidence that he was far from God.

"After that I experienced God as very near to me. He would walk with me through the highs and the lows. He was never distancing Himself when times got tough, He was right there in the thick of it with me. I

“  
I experienced  
God as very near  
to me.”

could really run to Him in those times when I felt a lot of despair," Fanie relates.

Even right from the start at the 2008 Beijing Games, he remembers God intervening for him when, during the 200m, his legs started going into spasm, and God gave him the strength to carry on and get over the line first.

At the London Games in 2012, Fanie went into the 200m race very confident with a lot of expectation resting on him as the world record holder at the time. Up until the last 50 metres he was in front but then five people passed him before the finish line and it felt as if his whole world imploded. "I went back to my room that night and I felt God say to me, 'Fanie, I love you because you are My son, and not because you can win medals. And I'm proud of you.'

All my years I had tried to perform to get acceptance and to be someone, and now I didn't have anything to give to give God except my worship. And I spent the next three days just worshipping Him and God really restored me through that."

On the final day, when Fanie ran the 100m, he successfully defended his title, knowing that his identity and God's love for him did not rest on the race's outcome.

"My first identity is as a son of God," he declares, "then is my identity as a sportsman. I start everything with Jesus."

Fanie and his brother Chris now run a Christian non-profit called Inspired 2 Become, focusing on alternative action sports and athletes with disabilities, and Fanie also coaches visually and intellectually impaired children. ●

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