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# TRAUMA TO TRUTH

BY HARRIET COOMBE

After a turbulent childhood, a traumatic marriage and the loss of her sense of self, Pamela "PJ" Elsmore embarked on a journey around the world in search of truth. When at last she found it, she returned home to Australia, where life hasn't been the same since.

PJ shares with *Challenge News* that early on in her life, her family immigrated to Perth, Western Australia, from New Zealand and not long after that, her parents divorced.

"There was lots of love from our parents, but there was a loss of the security of that nuclear family," PJ shares.

PJ's mother began a relationship with a man who had alcohol issues and, fearing for their safety, PJ, her mother and sister went into hiding. When PJ's mother met and married a new man, life didn't improve.

"They married when I was 12. I cried through the whole service. Something died inside of me and I believe that was the end of my childhood at that moment. There was a lot of abuse in my parents'

relationship and it was like being in a nightmare," PJ says. "[I experienced] sexual abuse, verbal abuse and emotional abuse."

PJ and her sister would visit their father every second weekend, until he started a new relationship, when the visits dropped to once a month.

"Then they got married and moved away and then it was every holidays.

"So he became more and more absent, which was upsetting for me as I was very close to my dad. His new wife was emotionally abusive too. And neither parent protected me from the behaviour of their spouses."

When PJ was five, before her parents split up, she had an experience that she consistently referred back to throughout her life.

"My dad had put me to bed, I had my little cat on the end of my bed and I was lying there, ready to go to sleep and I heard this voice about a foot from my face in the darkness say, 'Pamela, I love you.'"

Her father had left the room and there was no one else in her house that it could have been.

"I thought, 'That's God!' I just



knew in my spirit it was God."

After that, PJ began writing letters to God, telling Him about her life. Her faith was further strengthened when she attended a Scripture Union camp when she was 11.

"I gave my heart to Jesus at that camp. When I heard the gospel message, I knew that was what I wanted. I wanted to say yes to Jesus."

PJ recalls praying a prayer of salvation (similar to the one on page 11).

She was attending an Anglican church with her mother and sister at the time and made the decision to be baptised and receive Communion.

"Later on in my life, I was to go back to that experience as a five-year-old of God speaking to me and my baptism, because I nearly left my faith altogether," she admits.

In her teenage years, PJ recalls

multiple spiritual encounters at various churches and youth groups. At 18 she started attending a church and joined the music team.

• Turn to page 2

## Fun for Kids

Pages 5,6,7



## Youth Truth

Pages 8 and 9



**STRONG WEAKNESS**

**PHIL ROBERTS**

# Believing six impossible things before breakfast

BY JODY BENNETT

I HAD a discussion with someone the other day who liked *Challenge News* but disagreed with our stance on creation. He felt that six days couldn't be taken literally and that, in the light of textual criticism and evolutionary science, we should take those verses as instructive myth, rather than history. It got me thinking. Christianity is considered a religion of history, full of actual places names, dates and backed up by thousands of archaeological finds.

So, if we discard the first bit of Genesis as not historic, at what point do we then agree that history begins? If we use the argument of "It must make scientific sense" for reading the rest of the Bible, where does that leave us?

If it seems impossible that God made the Earth in six actual days, does it seem any more plausible that the entire Earth was deluged in a flood that killed everything except eight people and some animals on a wooden boat?

Does it seem likely that people used to live

to 900 years old; or that once everyone spoke the same language and then suddenly, out of nowhere, they were all speaking different languages (the story of the tower of Babel); or that a woman was turned to a pillar of salt (Lot's wife); or that the sun stood still for a whole day (Joshua) or went backwards! (Hezekiah); or that a man survived three days in the belly of a giant fish (Jonah); or that a donkey talked (Balak); or that all the water in Egypt turned to blood, and later all the first born children suddenly died in one night; or that a man was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot (Elijah)?

None of these things make sense scientifically, and this is just a small smattering of the bizarre and supernatural things in the Old Testament. Is it all just nonsense? Some would say so.

OK. What if we decide the whole OT is rubbish and we just believe the New Testament part of



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the Bible? Righto. How scientifically plausible is a virgin birth? How about the chemistry of water becoming (very good) wine in an instant?

What about paralysed people walking, a guy who was dead for four days and beginning to stink, coming to life (Lazarus); a man blind from birth, seeing; a man walking on water; two bits of fish and five loaves of bread being enough to feed more than 5000 people?

• Turn to page 2

# Trauma to truth

• From page 1

"I ended up meeting a guy and we got married, but he wasn't a Christian. He also had alcohol and anger issues. It lasted about four years, but during that time I was losing a sense of myself. I was going to church but I was living in the world as well. The church was a bit of a social club, we didn't have heart conversations. I would sometimes play music at church while still being intoxicated from nightclubbing the night before."

At the same time, she was asking questions about the Bible and sin but her questions went unanswered.

PJ admits she was living a double life and questioned whether the church and Christianity were for her. When her marriage fell apart, more doubts crept in.

"So I started to pray, 'If You're real, God, show me. Reveal Yourself to me so that I'll know You better. And while You're at it, reveal me to me because I don't know who I am anymore.'"

About two years later, when PJ embarked on a trip around the world, God answered her prayer.

In England she visited a church that took her in and, through read-

ing the Bible, praying and input from church members, her faith was restored. PJ says God revealed Himself to her and confronted her with her sin (wrongdoings and self-seeking) and she prayed for God's forgiveness and surrendered her life to Him.

"I finally had a proper relationship with Jesus. I'd been lovingly disciplined by the Father and I'd been placed in this community of people who loved me."

Since then, PJ's life hasn't always been smooth sailing. She married a man she met at Bible College but the relationship broke down a short time later.

"It was very traumatic," she shares.

But she turned to God in her pain and asked Him to guide her. "There was a profound journey of restoration and healing that came out of it."

PJ has now happily remarried and lives, works and attends church in Perth. She also volunteers with a prison ministry (she regularly leads music at a maximum security men's prison chapel service, and marks Bible studies and writes letters of encouragement to prison inmates). She also leads a workplace evangelistic prayer team in the city. •



PJ Elsmore at age 11.

# BELIEVING SIX IMPOSSIBLE THINGS BEFORE BREAKFAST

• From page 1

None of these things make sense. And yet each was witnessed by several people and testified to. How about a man being publically executed, dying in front of a crowd,

and then coming back to life three days later and appearing in a locked room? Over 500 people saw Him in the days after He came back to life. None of that is logical, scientifically verifiable or even practically possible – apart from God. The Bible says that

God uses the foolish things of this world to confound those who think they are wise. Looking at the above examples, you could say it is foolish to believe the Bible - and many people do, dismissing it completely on the basis of scientific rationalism.

Ok. Where does that leave us? Is it any more logical and scientifically rational to believe that the whole universe exploded out of nothing, by accident? Or that our intricate genetic code evolved out of chemicals with no process or design? Or that the beauty we see all around us in nature is random and accidental?

By discarding the Bible as ridiculous, materialistic thinking does not take away our problems of logic, it just creates new, and I would argue much more difficult, problems to grapple with.

Where does creativity come from? What is love and why do we do it? What makes us, us? There is more to the world than science, logic and what we can perceive with our senses. Christians are not the only ones to argue that.

And once we admit that scientific plausibility cannot be the only arbiter of truth, then the whole basis for rejecting Genesis as fact collapses.

The Bible is either all true, the Word of God, supernaturally written and preserved for us as a record of God's supernatural dealings with humanity right from the beginning; or it is all equally irrational and unbelievable.

It takes faith to accept the parts of it that we can't verify, but, let's not kid ourselves, it also takes incredible faith to believe there is no Author of the beauty around us, no immortal soul within us, no eternity, no final punishment for wrong, no moral basis for anything and no purpose to existence on Earth.

Pick your poison, but me, I believe God made the world in six days. Call me an idiot. •



Ilse Friis climbing Mount Kilimanjaro

## Experience the adventure

BY ILSE FRIIS

IN 2006 I had the privilege to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. Part of our preparation was to hear the account of and receive some valuable tips from a man who had done the climb the year before. Even though it gave us a better picture of what to expect, the experience at the end of the day far outweighed just talking and dreaming about this adventure. In the same way, we can grow up hearing about other people's experiences of faith and God, but until we set out ourselves to find God, we will never really understand what they are describing.

We can grow up in a Christian home, go to church, and hear about other people's relationship with Jesus, but it is not the same as having the life changing experience ourselves when we surrender our lives to Christ, ask His forgiveness for our sins and make Him the Lord of our lives.

Then we will start to understand what Christians mean when they say they: feel washed clean and new; have unquenchable joy; experience inexplicable peace; and feel that everything is suddenly more beautiful.

In Jeremiah 29: 13 God says, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." What a wonderful promise! We do not have to be satisfied with "hearsay" of what other people experience, but when we look for God we WILL find Him and experience Him ourselves. Christianity is not a set of rules and Bible stories, but a relationship with a living and loving God. Don't you want to make that choice today, to invite Him into your life and experience an intimacy with Him for yourself? See how on page 7. •

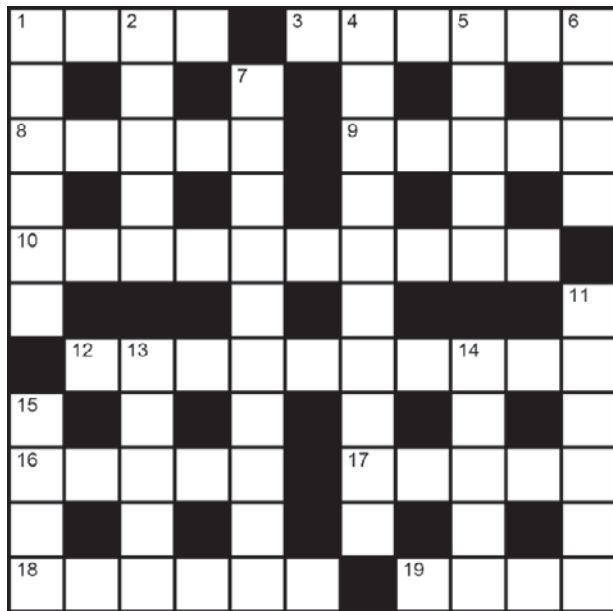
## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

### ACROSS

- 1 Proper \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 US stock market index
- 8 Worry, distress
- 9 Colon cleanser
- 10 The B in NBA
- 12 Poison for weeds (4,6)
- 16 Workers' collective
- 17 Inundated
- 18 Bear witness
- 19 Joint in metal

### DOWN

- 1 Close at hand
- 2 Powerful impulses
- 4 Baku's country
- 5 Abide as a resident
- 6 Four-channel sound
- 7 Personal maids etc.
- 11 Corsage flower perhaps
- 13 Put out
- 14 Renter's paper
- 15 Mountain lion



SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



			1	3		4	8	6
					9	7		
			6	4	1			
	8		9					7
		6				2		
4					2		5	
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# A fantastic downward step

BY ALAN BAILEY

ONE of the many effects of the virus pandemic has been its levelling of society. It is no respecter of persons. Even leaders of nations have been laid low with it. So a Prime Minister or a President has been lying in bed in the same way as all the infected rank and file. It has been indiscriminatory in taking lives. Celebrities have died. Young and old have passed away. No matter one's station in life, wearing a face mask became mandatory.

Stepping down is not something we do if we can avoid it. Stepping up is most desirable. But at this time we think of someone who took a step downward quite deliberately.

### A very different story

It was because of a different virus that it happened. The virus of sin, so invasive and universal. Right across the globe people are affected. The law of God is being broken every moment of every day. Sins' consequences are vastly more extensive than those of COVID 19.

The greatest step down was taken by the one who had the farthest to step down. Christ, the Son of God, stepped from a position of total perfection, of great glory, and came into a world of trouble and pain.

The poor countries of today are probably not all that different to the one he came and lived in.

He saw the deformed, the hungry, the outcasts on the street. No doubt he smelled the smells of drains and sewers and heard the crying of distressed children.



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He felt the cold and heat and experienced homelessness and fatigue.

Yet he identified with the needy. He didn't remove himself and yearn for his rightful home. He was with the people, loving them, showing compassion.

### Even further down

It seems harder to go further down than rock bottom.

But Jesus did, quite deliberately. He lost his reputation through false accusation and slander. He was stripped of his robe and abused verbally and physically. People treated him worse than they would an animal. After

lashing his back and opening up the flesh, they spiked him to a cross and stood back, hurling even more abuse. It was the kind of death everyone despised, both Roman and Jew.

It was reserved for the worst and yet in this case it happened to the best. After six hours, Jesus breathed out his last breath.

This Easter think of what He did and ask the question *Why?* He explained that it was for us. He loved people despite their evil doing.

He stepped down in order to give us the opportunity to step up. Not socially, but spiritually. We may now step up from our lowly place as sinners to sit with Christ and reign with him. Forgiven, and set for an eternity with him. No wonder we think Christmas and Easter are special. No wonder we want to tell the good news.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10: 13). •

# THE MOST DANGEROUS EVENT IN HISTORY

BY AKOS BALOUGH

**FOR** most people today, Easter is a long weekend spent with friends and family. But as British Journalist Peter Hitchens once pointed out, the first Easter contains the most dangerous ideas in human history. Here are 10 of them:

**1) The first Easter shows that we are worse than we imagined...**

We, modern people, love to think of ourselves as "good people", especially when comparing ourselves to rapists, robbers, and dictators. But on that first Easter, Jesus Christ died on a Roman cross. He did it because it was the only way to reconcile sinful, rebellious humanity to a Holy God (Matt 26:39). All our self-esteem training can't change this awful reality: we all fall short of God's perfect standards (Romans 3:23).

**2) ...But we are more loved than we could ever hope**

Despite being worse than we imagined, that first Easter proved God's love for us.

A love that doesn't paper over our worst features: but a love that sees us at our worst, and gives us His best.

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

**3) Our identity is ultimately given to us, not something we invent**

We live in the age of authenticity, where our inner feelings determine our identity. But in the final analysis, our inner feelings are not who we really are. Our ultimate identity is that of God's image-bearers, albeit fallen and rebellious. But on that first Easter, Jesus opened up the door to a mind-blowing new identity: sons and daughters of the living God (Galatians 4:4-7).

**4) Judgement Day is coming (and has already begun)**

On that first Easter, Jesus' tomb was empty.

He rose from the dead, just as He promised. He's now at God's right hand, ruling the universe, and will one day return to Judge everyone in it (Acts 17:31). Including us.

But for those in Christ Jesus, we've already passed through judgement, from death to life (Colossians 3:1-4).

**5) The universe is not meaningless chaos**

Jesus' resurrection proves that He is who He says He is:

God's appointed King, who made the world, and rules the world (Matthew 28:18). Thus, our universe is not random chaos (and never was). It's under Jesus' rule.

**6) Life is about God's Story, not our story**

Disney is wrong: life is not ultimately about following our dreams, and doing whatever turns us on.

God is unfolding His story for the universe. He's the Hero. And our job is to get on board with Him.

After all, it's the best story ever told.

**7) Life has intrinsic meaning**

Modern people believe that we make up our own meaning.

That might work in the short term, as long as you don't think too deeply about life and your upcoming death. But Jesus' resurrection shows that

life has purpose: a purpose that can see you through the darkest valleys of depression and despair.

**8) Death is not the end**

Death is not an impenetrable brick wall that ends our existence. Yes, it's awful, but for those in Christ, it's a mere speed hump to eternal glory. And

yet, for those who reject Christ, it's the doorway to despair unending.

**9) Justice will prevail...but only at the end**

The arc of human history doesn't bend toward justice (with apologies to MLK).

Rather, it's the story of man's inhumanity toward man. And yet, the first Easter proves that justice will prevail - but only at the end, when Jesus returns to Judge.

**10) Morality is not something we make up, but something we're accountable to**

Many in the West think that morality is arbitrary, like road rules.

We make it up, because at the end of the day, the universe has no moral order (or so we're told). But Jesus' resurrection proves there's a moral order to the universe, to which we're all accountable.

This leaves us with a question: how are we going to respond to history's most dangerous event?

“**How are we going to respond to history's most dangerous event?**”



The tomb was empty on that first Easter. He is risen!

# Journalist cracks the case

Mike Vogel as Chicago Tribune reporter Lee Strobel in the movie based on his most important story to date: *The Case for Christ*.

BY RUSTY WRIGHT

If you're a committed atheist and your spouse becomes a follower of Jesus, it might just rock your world. That's what happened to hardnosed *Chicago Tribune* legal affairs editor Lee Strobel, who marshalled his skills in journalism and law to find out what had happened to his wife, Leslie.

Strobel's quest became a bestselling book, *The Case for Christ*, and now a movie. He writes that Leslie's 1979 announcement stunned him. He felt "like the victim of a bait-and-switch scam. I had married one Leslie - fun... carefree...risk-taking - and now I feared she was going to turn into some sort of sexually repressed prude who would trade our upwardly mobile lifestyle for all-night prayer vigils and volunteer work in grimy soup kitchens." "Instead," he continues, "I was pleasantly surprised - even fascinated - by the fundamental changes in her character, her integrity, and her personal confidence." He aimed to investigate faith from top to bottom to see if it made sense.

The film stars Mike Vogel (*The Help*), Erika Christensen (*Frasier*, *Traffic*) and Oscar-winner Faye Dunaway (*Bonnie and Clyde*, *Network*). (Spoilers ahead.)

**Rigorous methods; avoiding pitfalls**

Educated at the University of Missouri School of Journalism and Yale Law School, Lee determined to use the rigorous methods a veteran journalist and legal analyst would about a court case: sifting evidence, evaluating reliability, considering alternatives. He studied history, archaeology, and ancient literature and interviewed experts.

Lee wanted to avoid pitfalls he had experienced earlier in his career when an apparently clear-cut case he was covering had its guilty verdict reversed. In retrospect, he realised he had been viewing the facts through preconceived biases that blinded him from objective evaluation. He determined to study from a fresh perspective the faith he had thought was a fairy tale.

For nearly two years he asked hard questions about source reliability, about Jesus' life, death and alleged Resurrection, and more.

The book and the film present what he discovered, not as academic treatises - though the book is well written for thinking readers, and extensively documented - but in the context of colorful, touching stories about how he wrestled with his findings.

**Sceptical, analytical questions**

The movie skillfully weaves his sceptical, analytical questions into the fabric of love, pain, sorrow and joy that composed his marriage and family life. A glimpse of what he encountered:

Regarding the source material, he found scholarly support for "the essential reliability of the New Testament documents...their accurate transmittal through history...exten-

sive corroboration by ancient historians and others," and for the assertion that "archaeology underscores their trustworthiness."

Regarding Jesus, he found multiple attestations that Jesus claimed deity. Jesus' "I and the Father are one" New Testament claim is echoed by contemporary friends... and even enemies, who accused Him of blasphemy for an assertion they considered outrageous.

Lots of mentally disturbed people believe they are God. Was Jesus one of them? Lee says Jesus' discourses display "no sign of dementia, delusions, or paranoia." Rather they evidence "profound wisdom...uncanny insights... poetic eloquence, and...deep compassion."

Jesus fulfilled many Hebrew prophecies regarding the Jewish Messiah. Lee cites Peter Stoner, a mathematician who calculated the probability of just eight of these coming true in one person as one chance in 1017.

**Empty tomb; a little girl's wish**

And Lee found convincing evidence that Jesus was executed, buried, and returned to life. The tomb was empty and many eyewitnesses said they saw Him alive again, some at the cost of their lives.

He concluded, "The atheism I had embraced for so long buckled under the weight of historical truth... It would require much more faith for me to maintain my atheism than to trust in Jesus of Nazareth!"

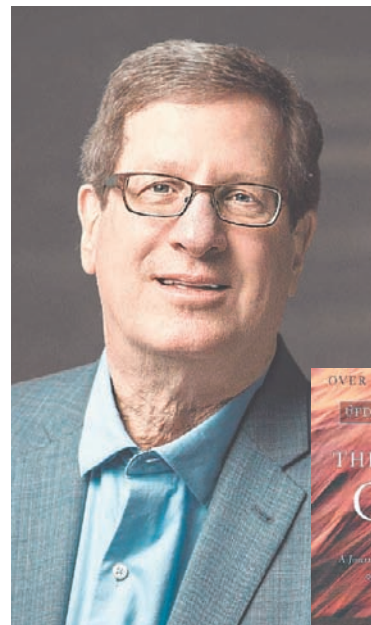
He asked Jesus to forgive him and become his personal friend in 1981.

The change in his formerly self-absorbed life was so radical that a few months later, his five-year-old daughter said, "Mommy, I want God to do for me what he's done for Daddy."

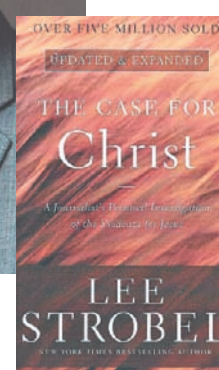
*The Case for Christ* is a compelling film that is sensitive toward those who disagree and aims to get viewers thinking about matters that can make a world of difference in their lives and families. Well worth seeing.

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. This article is from RustyWright.com and is used with kind permission.



Lee Strobel. INSET: The book he wrote about his investigation.



nudge WITH KARL FAASE

**A matter of truth not taste**

DAVID Platt in his book 'Radical', makes a helpful observation of religious life in the modern west.

Platt notes that we live in a society where everyone is seen as equal; of equal worth and standing. The extension of this belief is that every idea is of equal value. Platt writes, 'Just as every person is equally valued, so every idea is equally valued.'

If all ideas are equally valued, Platt reasons that faith and belief become a matter of taste not a matter of truth. Belief about God and the origins of our world should not be a matter of taste, but rather a search for what is true.

We should treat this as an important issue to study and research.

Faith and belief are not lifestyle choices; they ought to be the end result of careful consideration and reflection.

**"To continue in atheism, I would need to believe that nothing produces everything, non-life produces life, randomness produces fine-tuning, chaos produces information, unconsciousness produces consciousness, and non-reason produces reason. I simply didn't have that much faith."**

- Lee Strobel

# My scars do not define me

**K**echi Okwuchi was 16 years old when she survived a horrific plane crash in Nigeria, which left her with third degree burns on more than 65 percent of her body. Refusing to give up, Kechi drew strength from faith, family and music, and eventually inspired people around the world when she appeared on *America's Got Talent*. She recently released new music and a book detailing her painful but hopeful story.

In an interview with the 700 Club, Kechi shares what she remembers of the plane crash in 2005.

"I was heading home for the Christmas holidays with 60 other students from my high school along with other passengers," Kechi recalls.

"There were 109 of us on the plane including the flight crew. I remember it being a very regular flight until it just suddenly wasn't. [There was] about 15 minutes left in the flight when the pilot started to descend."

That's when the turbulence started and panic rippled throughout the plane.

"Everyone was panicking, screaming and praying – it was just chaos inside the cabin. The last thing I remember is holding my friend's hand. She was in the aisle seat next to mine. There was this really loud scraping metal sound that jars the brain – that's the last thing I remember before the darkness took over and I guess at that point that's when the plane crashed."

Kechi's next memory was five weeks later when she awoke from a coma in a hospital in Johannesburg. She went on to discover she was one of two survivors of the plane crash and was now covered in third-degree burns.

“**Everyone was just panicking, screaming and praying.**”

"In a way, reality had forced me to choose between two extremes. I could either hide totally from the world or show myself totally to the world. I was forced to either completely accept myself or completely reject myself. The plane crash has altered my face and body, but it did not take the essence of who I was."

Kechi's mother stayed by her bedside in the hospital and her Christian faith began to inspire Kechi. Before the accident, Kechi viewed Christianity and church as an "obligatory part of my life".

"It was just something I took for granted, something that I had because my parents believed it. It wasn't anything personal until after the accident when I got to a place where I had to kind of redefine what it means to be a Christian for myself. For the first time I had to decide what God meant to me and have the interest in developing something direct and personal with him as opposed to an indirect faith that I had from my mom."

In an interview with *wonderfullymade.org*, Kechi said she chose God as her "resting place".

"Learning to pray, delve deep, and understand Him was a very new experience for me because I'd never done anything like that prior to the accident. I was quickly learning that there was a peace that came with knowledge of Him and seeking Him out in prayer that I could never get anywhere else.

"This is coming from someone who was constantly laying down, medicated, and struggling, whether it's a pain, itching, or discomfort in one way or another. I was always uncomfortable inside my physical body, but there was something that prayer and seeking God, like what it did for me on the inside, translated into the outside as well.

"That peace, knowledge, assurance of His protection, and the fact that He's listening to you and He's with you on this journey of life is



Kechi Okwuchi

something that gave me peace on the inside and translated into the outside as well...

"After I left the hospital and [faced] the world again, I needed that peace and assurance to live my life as normally as possible. That's what allowed me to face different difficulties in this world with confidence because I knew that I wasn't doing it alone... In every phase of my life, I learned that it's so much easier when God is involved."

After putting her faith and trust in Jesus, Kechi began to see herself through different eyes.

"God gave me the ability to see the part

of me that went beyond my physical appearance, the part of me that mattered most," Kechi writes in her book.

"He had shown me Kechi through his eyes, and she was beautiful. This was the very moment that birthed a phrase that would become my life motto: My scars do not define me. There was much more to my identity than that. I am more than my scars. No one, but God showed me that."

A surprising change that occurred after Kechi's accident was that her voice changed.

"It sounded different from before the plane crash," Kechi tells *wonderfullymade.org*.

"No one understands why... Music then became this thing that I could not only enjoy but sing along to my favorite songs with more confidence. It was so nice to have this good thing.

"It didn't seem like a lot, but in a sea of negatives, having that was so important to me because it was one good thing that weirdly came out of this, so I ran with it. It became such a big part of my healing."

In 2017, Kechi appeared on the television program, *America's Got Talent*, and she found herself singing in the finals of the competition and sharing her story with thousands of people around the world.

The following year Kechi released her debut single, *Don't You Dare* and became a burn survivor advocate for multiple organisations, including the burns hospital she was treated at in America.

In 2019, Kechi became a finalist on the premiere season of *America's Got Talent: The Champions* through Simon Cowell's golden buzzer.

Kechi released her memoir *More Than My Scars* in March 2022 and her self-titled debut album is currently streaming on all digital music platforms.

## It's a 'Yes' from me

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

**HOW** exciting for *America's Got Talent* contestants to hear from adjudicators, "It's a 'yes' from me."



How their faces light up when the fourth judge says, "And, it's a 'yes' from me too – you now have four yeses!!"

The "Yes" word is a powerful word of approval! – a real morale booster – whereas its opposite, "No," can shatter you.

I remember a young fellow who desperately hoped for a "yes". He was keen on a nice looking girl. He took a mate with him into the phone box in case she said "no" and he needed someone to hold him up.

"No," it was, which deflated him like a flat bike tyre. But, when God says, "YES" it's "yes" indeed. Listen to these exciting words: "But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No'. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not 'Yes' and 'No', but in him it has always been 'Yes'. For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:18-20)

"And this is what He promised us — even eternal life." (1 John 2:25)

What a promise!! – "even eternal life!"

And this is where we need to say 'Yes.'

"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:11-13)

It's all about saying "yes" to Jesus and accepting Him as our Savior and Lord.

To those who sincerely turn away from their sins – no matter how bad or depraved – and accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior, His response will be, "It's a yes from me."

## ATHEIST CONFRONTS THE FACTS

BY JAMES BISHOP

**F**ormer atheist, Guillaume Bignon "grew up in a wonderfully loving family in France, near Paris." His family "were nominally Roman Catholic, and would regularly attend mass, but this religious expression seemed to be more out of a tradition and maybe superstition than a true life conviction."

At the age of 12 he stopped "going through the motions of religious rituals and meaningless recitations".

Guillaume says that he "grew up to be a pretty happy young adult." After studying at university, he landed a job as a computer scientist for a large investment bank and, at 6 feet 4 inches, played volleyball in the national league, travelling across France every weekend for games. "All in all, I was pretty happy with my life, and in a thoroughly secular culture, the chances of ever hearing (let alone believing) the Gospel were incredibly slim."

Then one holiday he became romantically involved with an American woman who believed in God.

Even worse "she believed that sex belonged only in marriage (an even more problematic belief than theism, if it was at all possible)." This relationship got Guillaume "thinking about [faith]. What good reason was there to think God exists, and what good reason was there to think atheism was true instead?"

"My own unbelief ... was more a reasonable life assumption than the conclusion of a solid argument ... So I started to take the question seriously, to objectively assess its credibility."

In order to do so, he began reading the Bible and prayed to God as an "experiment".

"If there is a God, then here I am, I'm looking into this, why don't You go ahead and reveal Yourself to me? I'm open." I wasn't

(open), really, but I figured that shouldn't stop God if He existed. So I read in the gospels about this Jesus of Nazareth.

"I was rather impressed by the way He manoeuvred in conversation, and the wisdom of some of His retorts ... this man knew what He was doing, He spoke with authority, and it made me somewhat uncomfortable."

"It seemed clear Jesus was at least a person of history who walked the roads of Palestine in the first century, and apparently His story was compelling enough that these ancient followers of His believed it, and even suffered for preaching His death and resurrection. ... I knew that at some point I would need to give a coherent account of who I thought Jesus in fact was. But all of this was nowhere near changing my view or my life habits."

Guillaume couldn't visit a church because he was travelling every weekend for volleyball.

However, two weeks later his shoulder became so inflamed he couldn't play, so he decided to go to church "to see what those Christians do when they get together ... Frankly, I went to that church like I would go to the zoo: to see some weird exotic animals that

I had read about in books ... I remember thinking that if any of my friends or family could see me there in the building (a church!) I would die of shame." At the end of the service Guillaume spoke to the pastor and this opened up a series of dialogues between the two.

"He gave me a study guide he had written, which laid out the basics of the Christian faith ... I went through this thoroughly at home." But although Christianity began to make sense, Guillaume still wondered "why did Jesus have to die?"

In response to his question, "God reactivated my conscience. That was not a pleasant experience. I suddenly

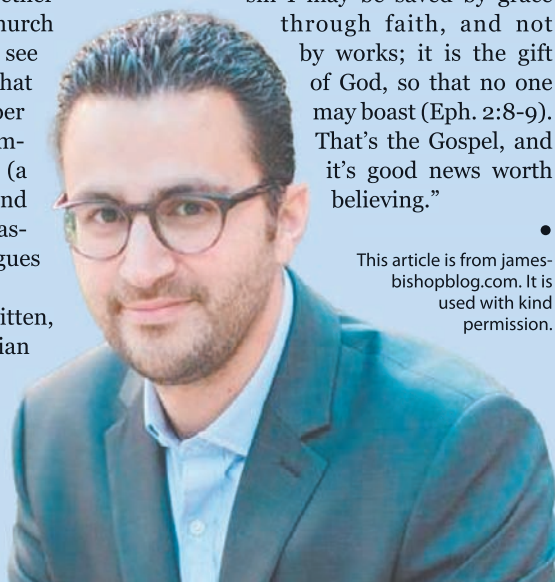
realized a truth I knew but had worked very hard to suppress ... me, that is why Jesus had to die: ... me ... He took upon Himself the penalty that I deserved, so that in God's justice, my sins would be forgiven freely, by grace as a gift, rather than by my righteous deeds or religious rituals ... So I accepted the whole thing: I placed my trust in Jesus, and asked Him to forgive me in the way the New Testament promised He would."

This massive step had a significant impact on Guillaume's life. "The guilt was gone, and I received the freedom and forgiveness Jesus promised. This whole story of mine started to make sense and exhibit purpose: I had experienced the living God, who revealed Himself to me in the person of Jesus Christ. I was all in."

Guillaume has since earned a PhD in systematic and philosophical theology, got married, and now has children.

He concludes: "I was not looking for God; I did not seek Him, and I didn't want Him. He reached out to me, loved me while I was still a sinner, broke down my defenses, and decided to pour out His undeserved grace (love), that His Son might be glorified, and that, from my sin I may be saved by grace through faith, and not by works; it is the gift of God, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8-9). That's the Gospel, and it's good news worth believing."

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# Youth Truth

## MY FAITH GREW FROM MY DOUBTS

**F**or many people, no matter what they believe, doubt can creep in and threaten to derail their faith. Question after question arises until it seems there is nothing left to hold onto. Is it possible to overcome doubt despite unanswered questions?



Bobby Conway and his wife Heather.

Bobby Conway found that it was and that in fact his season of doubt was a positive in his life.

Age 19 was the first turning point in Bobby's life. Prior to this he describes himself as "insecure, angry, confused, uneducated, promiscuous, a boozier, addictive, foolish, rebellious, and a decent baseball player," according to his website bio.

Then his college baseball teammate took Bobby to hear a Christian speaker called Greg Laurie.

"I resonated with Greg — a recovering pothead, laid back, and a blue jean-wearing Bible-teaching evangelist," he says on his website. "His message resonated and soon afterward I was following Jesus."

Bobby's newfound faith was strong and he never imagined he would wrestle with doubts in his faith in the future.

"Typical of that honeymoon season falling in love with Jesus, I had a great zeal for the Lord," Bobby shares with Pastor Jason Jimenez in an episode of the *Challenging Conversations* podcast. "But the further I kept growing in this Christian faith, and the deeper I kept going into it as it relates to studying philosophy and apologetics, I started to bump into some questions that I had a hard time resolving."

Bobby pored over books to try and find immediate, simple answers to his complex queries, but there often weren't any.

"For every book that I tried to read to chase down the answer to my doubts, I would collect 10 more questions and more doubts, and the snowball kept growing."

When Bobby started Bible College, he hoped his theological questions would finally be answered. But the doubts remained and he felt exhausted from all the different questions.

Even after graduating seminary and becoming a church pastor and apologist (someone who defends the Christian faith), he still secretly battled doubts. He recalls crying out in prayer, "God, I'm struggling to believe this. I'm wondering if You are there. Please know that my heart hates these doubts."

His doubts caused Bobby so much distress that he became depressed and suicidal. He felt like a hypocrite.

"I ended up in counselling. I ended up on antidepressants. I was suffering because I

didn't know how to live. I thought: 'What if I've been duped?' I gave myself to this Christian worldview. I threw myself all in it, prepared myself for ministry, and now, my brain is producing questions way faster than I can track down the answers to." Bobby's second turning point was five years ago when, he says, God "broke into my dark night of the soul" and removed his doubts.

He now looks back at his time of deep doubt as positive and beneficial to his life as an apologist.

**“**I was suffering because I didn't know how to live.**”**

"[It had] got to a point when I was in that agony that I had to imagine how to live again. If I wasn't going to be a Christian, where do I go? And so I would envision, 'Well, what if I was an atheist? What if I was an agnostic? What if I was a Buddhist? What if I was whatever?' I would think about what it would be like to live in that

worldview and what type of questions and doubts I would inherit. And then, I would just try to resolve those, and when all was said and done, it was like I broke out, and it was like Christianity seemed like the greatest, and the strongest, and the most beautiful and the most wonderful worldview of them all."

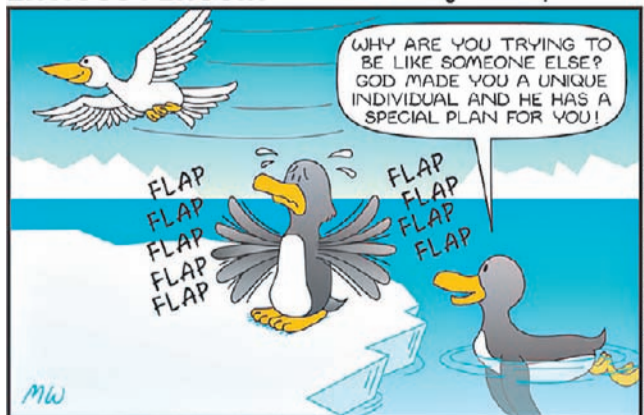
"It was like, 'Wow, God, You didn't leave me, You didn't abandon me. You really were there,'" he shares.

"It meant so much to me because I just felt like I fell in love with Him again." Bobby realized that his relationship with God had become a Q+A session with God, instead of a friendship. "My heart got detached from the process," he admits. "I lost my way in the journey. Doubt is not a Christian problem. It's a human problem. In the absence of certainty, there is always going to be room for doubt. The question is which worldview best closes the doubt gap. All of a sudden, I was able to realize that, 'Why do I always feel like I have to be on the defensive as a Christian? The atheist has to give answers, too.' We're not alone in this endeavor. It was just so freeing."

Bobby is married to Heather and they have two adult children. He has a YouTube channel and website called One Minute Apologist and has written four books.

### ENVOIOUS PENGUIN

A Joyful 700n by Mike Waters



A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.

— PROVERBS 14:30 NIV

## Painting the process

BY ALYSSA MITCHELL

I was raised in a Christian household, but as I got older, I grew sceptical. Why, of all the religions, would Christianity be true? These initial doubts grew alongside the decline of my mental health, most of which stemmed from extreme insecurity. At home, I was told that I was precious and loved by God, but at school, I was told that I was ugly and that my value depended on my relationship status. The bullying only intensified when, at age 13, my first boyfriend leaked explicit pictures of me.

When the photos leaked, I lost a ton of friends. I tried to reclaim some sense of self-worth by pouring my energy into extracurricular activities and trying to get straight As in even the hardest classes. I aimed to combat the judgment and gossip by achieving "perfection". I managed the pressure for a bit, but I eventually fell victim to both panic attacks and self-harm. Then, towards the end of high school, I started partying. My then-boyfriend and I partied every weekend ... drinking and doing other things we shouldn't have been doing. With each passing week, I felt like I was losing more and more of myself — and even my touch with reality.

At this point, I was still sceptical of my childhood faith, but I wanted direction from a higher power of some sort. I decided to examine religion as a whole.

I listened to a bunch of testimonies and quickly found that the Christian testimonies stood out. Every story of healing — from schizophrenia to various types of demonic possession — was centred on Jesus. Similarly, everyone with a documented near-death experience claimed to have met the same God — the God of the Bible.

Then came the overwhelming evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. I learned a lot about this from Lee Strobel, a reporter who began investigating Christianity in the hopes of disproving the resurrection. After interviewing a slew of historians and archaeologists, he surrendered his life to Christ. Like me, he doubted the faith — until he investigated for himself.

I knew, deep in my gut, that Jesus was the truth. I started trying to pursue a relationship with Him, but my relationship with my boyfriend slowed my growth.

He wasn't merely a nonbeliever — he hated the faith to the point of blaspheming God and burning Scripture for fun. I eventually came to a crossroads: I could either stick with my boyfriend or follow God. I'd been with him for over a year and was pretty invested ... but I wanted Jesus more. Soon after our breakup, I got baptised — and since then, nothing has been the same. Jesus has changed everything. As soon as I began following Him, I noticed a supernatural change in my desires. Activities I



Alyssa with her painting of what has taken place in her heart.



once loved became nearly intolerable. As I realized this, God placed an image in my head of His shed blood pouring into my heart and renewing me, day by day. I turned that image into a painting.

This painting reflects 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Not only does the Lord cleanse us of addictions, idols, and other sins, He then fills us with joy, peace, and all of the fruits of the Spirit.

Before I began this project, I asked my friends and family what they thought people turned to for fulfilment. Many listed food, money, social media, beauty, drugs, and alcohol. So, I filled the heart with those things. I then added chains, because I was

bound to sin and misery without God. The words on the chains represent the false identities that bind so many people. These include ugly, confused, defeated, lost, hopeless, empty, jealous, alone, depressed, rejected, misunderstood, afraid, and fragile. The wine flowing from the cup represents Christ's purifying, life-giving

**“**I fell victim to panic attacks and self harm.**”**

blood — the blood of the New Covenant.

As you can see, everything that the Blood has touched has turned bright white. This is exactly what happens to the heart of a believer.

The final piece of the painting is a portion of Ezekiel 36, written under the heart: "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

The Lord has sprinkled clean water on me, and if you turn to Him, He will do the same for you.

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

## Develop an attitude of gratitude



"The first step to being happy is being grateful, so focus on counting your blessings, not your burdens. Regularly writing down all you are grateful for doesn't only make you feel good, it can improve overall well-being."

— Dr Michael Mol

# I went from witchcraft to worship

BY NATASHA NAGEL  
(JOY! MAGAZINE)

I grew up in a messed up, dysfunctional home with totally absent parents. Although we were brought up as 'Christians' we were only Christian because we were nothing else; none of us knew God at all. I grew up with extremely strict parents; my dad was a very short-tempered, angry man. Although he never laid a finger on us, he was verbally abusive. He was very controlling, and because of this we did not really have any friends growing up – at home, we were not allowed to talk about anything outside of the home life.

## Getting involved with mysticism

Years ago, when I was 13 or 14, we went through a huge tragedy in our family where two of my cousins died in a big car accident – this was the closest I had come to losing someone close to me.

A friend of mine was into mysticism and suggested that we should play on a ouija board and call my dead cousins up to talk to them and ask questions.

We made a circle with lots of candles and she led the whole thing. Nothing really happened at that moment, BUT since that day my whole life completely changed.

Over time I started getting more and more depressed, experiencing dark and suicidal thoughts. I became obsessed with images of blood, death, graveyards, people being hurt, vampires, demons etc. I studied the occult and became a Wiccan in witchcraft.

## Haunted from the inside



Natasha Nagel is now free from her occult past.  
INSET: Natasha in her Wiccan days.

Time went on and my thoughts continued to get darker and darker. I started feeling like I was being tormented from the inside out, literally! I felt like there was something inside my inner most being that was busy killing me – I even saw a 'vision' where I needed to stab my dad with a knife, as if demons were leading me to do this! I was scared and alone and in literal, emotional, and spiritual torment!

## A terrifying encounter

One morning in 2008, I woke up, sat up in bed, and gazed into the mirror in front of me. As I was looking, something within me was looking straight at me through my eyes, but it was not me!

That day something took over me – at times I could not talk or control my actions. My mom was busy doing laundry outside and said that she could hear me talking to deep, terrifying voices, but I was completely alone in the room!

She came into my room and I lost control of my actions, swearing at her and chasing her out with so much hate and anger. I could not

speak, only demons were speaking through me.

## In the name of Jesus

There were some people who were in our house at the time, they ran into my room and started praying for me.

At the moment when they said, "Satan in the name of Jesus Christ we rebuke you" demons started to manifest inside me! I cannot explain the pain and torment I experienced, it was a huge spiritual battle.

A powerful presence manifested in my room while these people were praying for me – I felt pure love, acceptance, warmth, and compassion.

I knew that it was Jesus Christ in the room, and I knew in my heart that if I didn't accept Him in that moment, I wouldn't make it!

So I did, I started to turn away from my sin, from all my involvement in the occult and I also started to forgive all the people who had done me wrong.

At that moment, Jesus set me free! Today I am still in His service, going about where ever I can sharing my story to whoever is willing to listen. •

# SELF-HELP WAS NO HELP

BY JOSH SWANSON

Though I was raised in the church, I never believed. No one around me had answers to the tough questions I asked, so in middle school, I left the church entirely. I became not only an atheist, but an anti-theist. In my mind, religion was simply a means of comfort, Christianity was just another religion, and believers were brain-washed sheep.

I was certain that this earthly life was all there was, so I aimed to make the most of it. In high school, I got pretty heavy into partying. This continued into college, but there, the partying was accompanied by severe homesickness, loneliness, and depression. My new friendships felt empty; we often just smoked weed, then parted ways. I spent a lot of time alone and it was during these times that I'd do my "self-help" thinking. I'd spent hours meditating on my flaws and coming up with improvement plans. Looking back, recognising that I was flawed was a key turning point; I was onto something, but my efforts were futile. Something was missing.

One night, like usual, my friends and I got high, then went our separate ways. I was alone in my dorm room, thinking about life, when I heard commotion downstairs. It sounded like the police were present, yet, for some reason, I felt pushed to throw on my jacket and go scope it out. I expected to find a chaotic scene, but when I got downstairs, I found nothing but silence. I was weirded out and didn't want to return to my room, so I went for a walk.

“  
All of the answers I'd been searching for became crystal clear.”

I eventually settled in at a picnic table. There, I realized that it was freezing outside, but because of my coat, I wasn't the least bit cold. I didn't have much growing up, so this coat, which was gifted to me by an uncle, really meant a lot to me. I was sitting there, expressing gratitude, from a totally secular standpoint, when I was suddenly enveloped in this overpowering, indescribable feeling of warmth, comfort, love, and total acceptance. In that moment, God revealed Himself to me, an anti-theist. I felt Him say "I'm here" and that I didn't have to try so hard to fix myself. I immediately and suddenly believed that my own efforts were in vain, but that this Person I had encountered could and would help me.

Then, as crazy confirmation, this beautiful leaf fell before me. It was a curled, slightly broken maple leaf. By the influence of the Holy Spirit, I understood that this leaf was me; whereas I saw myself as a broken thing, worthless unless fixed, God – who knew every detail of every one of my flaws – cherished me nonetheless. Closeness to Him did not require that I first be fixed; rather, He says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" [2 Corinthians 12:9]. All of the answers I'd been searching for became crystal clear in that moment. I was so insanely overwhelmed; I sat there for a while, bawling my eyes out.

By the time I headed back to my dorm room, it was about one o'clock in the morning. As I approached my building, I ran into two of my friends. When they asked what I was up to, it all became very, very real. I knew that this was a crossroads. Would I be ashamed or would I proclaim my newfound faith? "I just became a Christian," I said. They were almost as shocked as I was! I now knew that God was real and, though I used the term "Christian," I wasn't really sure which faith tradition, if any, was true. I didn't want to just default to Christianity. After reading everything I could get my hands on about a variety of faiths, I relaxed into what I knew was true: Jesus was Lord. The historical evidence, especially as it relates to the resurrection, was overwhelming.

On top of that, all of the other traditions depended on man's own ability to overcome sin and gain spiritual enlightenment – something that human brokenness simply doesn't allow. Christianity is the only tradition predicated upon grace alone. It was obvious... Jesus was the only way. And this truth couldn't be reconciled with any other faith system. I began to walk with Christ. That was seven years ago. Since, my faith has only continued to grow. This growth has nothing to do with my own righteousness or my own efforts; like every other child of God, I am dependent on God's grace – the same grace that chased me down and brought me out of darkness and into His marvellous light. •

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



Josh Swanson

# What is your purpose in life?

CONSIDER a hammer. It's designed to hit nails. That's what it was created to do. Now imagine that the hammer never gets used. It just sits in the toolbox. The hammer doesn't care.

But now imagine that same hammer with a soul, a self-consciousness. Days and days go by with him remaining in the toolbox. He feels funny inside, but he's not sure exactly why. Something is missing, but he doesn't know what it is.

Then one day someone pulls him out of the toolbox and uses him to break some branches for the fireplace. The hammer is exhilarated. Being held, being wielded, hitting the branches – the hammer loves it. At the end of the day, though, he is still unfulfilled. Hitting the branches was fun, but it wasn't enough. Something is still missing.

In the days that follow, he's used often. He reshapes a hubcap, blasts through some sheetrock, and knocks a table leg back into place. Still, he's left unfulfilled. He wants to be used as much as possible to knock things around, to break things, to blast things, to dent things. He figures that



he just hasn't had enough of these events to satisfy him.

Then one day someone uses him on a nail. Suddenly, the lights come on in his hammer soul. He now understands what he was truly designed for. He was meant to hit nails. All the other things he hit pale in comparison. Now he knows what his hammer soul was searching for all along. We are created in God's image for relationship with him. Being in that relationship is the only thing that will ultimately satisfy our souls. Until we come to know God, we've had many wonderful experiences, but we haven't hit a nail. We've been used for some noble purposes, but not the one we were ultimately designed for,

not the one through which we will find the most fulfilment.

A relationship with God is the only thing that will quench our soul's longing. Jesus Christ said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." Until we come to know God, we are hungry and thirsty in life. We try to "eat" and "drink" all kinds of things to satisfy our hunger and thirst, but yet they remain.

We are like the hammer. We don't realize what will end the emptiness, the lack of fulfilment, in our lives. Usually when we keep God out, we try to find fulfilment in something other than God, but we can never get enough of that thing. We keep "eating" or "drinking" more and more, erroneously thinking that 'more' is the answer to the problem, yet we are never ultimately satisfied.

Our greatest desire is to know God, to have a relationship with God. Why? Because that's how we've been designed. Have you hit a nail yet? •

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# Astrophysicist's atheism upended

Former atheist Sarah Salviander, is a research scientist in astronomy and astrophysics at the University of Texas. She was born in the United States but brought up in an atheist household in Canada.

"My parents were socialists and political activists who thought British Columbia would be a better place for us to live, since it had the only socialist government in North America at the time. My parents were also atheists, though they preferred that label in favour of "agnostic". They were kind, loving, and moral, but religion played no part in my life. Instead, my childhood revolved around education, particularly science. I remember how important it was to my parents that my brother and I did well in school," Sarah recounts.

"I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when science fiction was enjoying a renaissance, thanks largely to the popularity of *Star Wars*. I remember how fascinated I was by the original *Star Wars* trilogy ... it got me thinking about space in a big way."

Sarah was also particularly fond of the well-known astronomer Carl Sagan's space series *Cosmos*: "The combination of these influences led to such an intense wonder about outer space and the universe." At the age of nine, Sarah knew she "would be a space scientist someday".

"In retrospect," she continues, "It's amazing that for the first 25 years of my life, I met only three people who identified as Christian. My view of Christianity was negative from an early age, and by the time I was in my twenties I was actively hostile toward Christianity. Looking back, I realized a lot of this was the unconscious absorption of the general hostility toward Christianity that is common in places like Canada and Europe; my hostility certainly wasn't based on actually knowing anything about Christianity."

"I had come to believe that Christianity made people weak and foolish; I thought it was philosophically trivial. I was ignorant not only of the Bible, but also of the deep philosophy of Christianity and the scientific discoveries that shed new light on the origins of the universe and life on Earth."

Sarah focused her energy on her studies and academic pursuits, "I became very dedicated to my physics and math courses. I joined campus clubs, started to make friends, and, for the first time in my life, I was meeting Christians." These Christians she met, however, came across as "joyous and content. And, they were smart, too."

She mentions her surprise when she discovered that her physics professors, whom she admired, were Christians, "Their personal example began to have an influence on me, and I found myself growing less hostile to Christianity."

Sarah prospered in her field, notably in the study of big bang cosmology.

"I had joined a group in the Centre for Astrophysics and Space Sciences (CASS) that was researching evidence for the big bang. The cosmic background radiation — the leftover radiation from the big bang — provides the strongest evidence for the theory, but cosmologists need other, independent

lines of evidence to confirm it.

"My group was studying deuterium abundances in the early universe. Deuterium is an isotope of hydrogen, and its abundance in the early universe is sensitive to the amount of ordinary mass contained in the entire universe. Believe it or not, this one measurement tells us whether the big bang model is correct."

She was "astounded by this, blown away, completely and utterly awed. It seemed incredible to me that there was a way to find the answer to this question we had about the universe. In fact, it seems that every question we have about the universe is answerable.

"There's no reason it has to be this way, and it made me think of [Albert] Einstein's observation that the most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it's comprehensible.

"I started to sense an underlying order to the universe. Without knowing it, I was awakening to what Psalm 19 tells us so clearly, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."*

She then read *The Count of Monte Cristo*: "It's more than just a revenge story, it's a philosophically deep examination of forgiveness and God's role in giving justice. I was surprised by this, and was starting to realize that the concept of God and religion was not as philosophically trivial as I had thought."

Sarah soon came to the view that belief in God is unavoidable. She was "walking across that beautiful La Jolla campus. I stopped in my tracks when it hit me — I believed in God! I was so happy; it was like a weight had been lifted from my heart.

"I realized that most of the pain I'd experienced in my life was of my own making, but that God had used it to make me wiser and more compassionate. It was a great relief to discover that there was a reason for suffering, and that it was because God was loving and just. God could not be perfectly just unless I — just like everyone else — was made to suffer for the bad things I'd done."

Despite her radical transformation from atheism to belief, Sarah felt she stagnated in her faith.

"For a while I was content to be a theist and didn't pursue religion any further. I spent another very enjoyable summer with CASS, and then during my last year at EOU I met a man I liked very much, a computer science student from Finland. He'd been in the special forces in the Finnish Defence Force, and was just about the most off-the-wall character I'd ever met. But he was also a man of strength, honour, and deep integrity,



Sarah Salviander now has an active online and speaking ministry to address how Christianity and science "completely agree".

and I found myself overwhelmingly drawn to those qualities."

This man, like her, had grown up in an atheist home but later had "come to embrace God and Jesus Christ as his personal Savior in his early twenties through an intensely personal experience."

After they were married, Sarah finished her degree and they had a year apart when she had to move to Austin, Texas for her graduate work in astrophysics. One day while browsing a local bookstore, she came across a title called *The Science of God* authored by the Jewish physicist Gerald Schroeder: "I was intrigued by the title, but something else compelled me to read it. Maybe it was the loneliness I was feeling, and I was longing for a deeper connection with God. All I know is that what I read changed my life forever."

She thinks of Schroeder as a unique individual: "He is an MIT-trained physicist and also an applied theologian. ... His work proved to me that Genesis 1 was scientifically sound, and not just a "silly myth" as atheists believed. I realized that, remarkably, the Bible and science agree completely."

Sarah then read the gospels of the New Testament.

"I found the person of Jesus Christ to be extremely compelling. I felt as Einstein did when he said he was 'enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene'. And yet I struggled, because I did not feel one hundred percent convinced of the Gospels in my heart.

"I knew of the historical evidence for their truth. And, of course, I knew the Bible was reliable because of Genesis. Intellectually, I knew the Bible to be true, and as a person of intellect, I had to accept it as truth, even if I didn't feel it. That's what faith is. As C. S. Lewis said, it is accepting something you know to be true in spite of your emotions.

"So I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior."

Sarah still struggled with her faith saying that she "sometimes worried" about it. During this period, she had a cancer diagnosis and an unpleasant course of treatment.

"Not long after, my husband fell ill with meningitis and encephalitis, and it was not clear if he would recover; we didn't know if he would be paralysed or worse. It took him about a month, but, thankfully, he did recover."

Sarah and her husband then went through the loss of their child.

"At that time, we were expecting our first child, a baby girl. All seemed well until about six months, when our baby stopped growing. We found out she had Trisomy 18, a fatal chromosomal abnormality. Our daughter, Ellinor, was stillborn soon after. It was the most devastating loss of our lives. For a while I despaired, and didn't know how I could go on after the death of our daughter.

"But I finally had a clear vision of our little girl in the loving arms of her heavenly Father, and it was then that I had peace. I reflected that, after all these trials in one year, my husband and I were not only closer to each other, but also felt closer to God. My faith was real."

Sarah reflects: "I don't know how I would've coped with such trials when I was an atheist. When you're 20 years old and healthy, and you have your family around you, you feel immortal. I never thought about my own death or the potential deaths of loved ones.

"But there comes a time when the feeling of immortality wanes, and you're forced to confront the inevitability of not only your own annihilation, but that of your loved ones."

Sarah concludes: "The only way we are free is if the universe and everything in it was created, not by some unconscious mechanism, but by a personal being — the God of the Bible. The only way our lives are unique, purposeful, and eternal is if a loving God created us."

This article is from jamesbishop-blog.com. It has been abridged.



*The Story of the Cosmos* - a book to which Sarah contributed a chapter.

## Cheesecakes and creation

PETER'S CORNER

I'VE been practising making my mother's baked



cheesecake recipe for a while, and I am told it is bearing good fruit.

Now think about this. The chef follows a recipe, or a process, or a code, that is designed to produce a perfect cheesecake. The ingredients do not become a cake just by themselves if we wait long enough. The right amount of time is part of the process — I discovered that when I forgot the cake was in the oven, but fortunately my wife Denise, instead of the fire brigade, came to the rescue.

In the same way, considering the origin of life, molecules are not going to become people by evolution, just by waiting long enough. Even after any amount of time, if there is no design, there can be no people.

The cheesecake recipe is an intelligent code that is separate from the ingredients. The flour, sugar, butter and cheese have no idea that they are on their way to becoming cheesecake. The key is this: the property of being a cheesecake does not come from the ingredients. Whenever we see that key, we see the fingerprints of intelligent design.

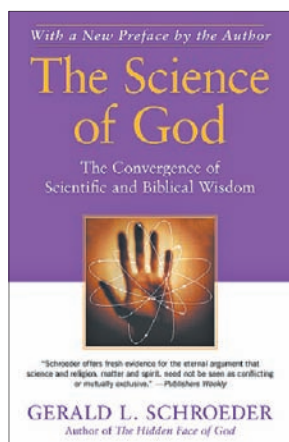
Another example is seen in the boomerang, which is a specially shaped wooden tool designed so that when thrown, it returns to the thrower. The property of being able to return is not a property of the wood that the boomerang is made of. That is how we know for sure it was designed.

In the same way, our DNA carries a code that does not arise from the DNA itself, and it's a great code that has all the information to make people! The DNA has no idea it is carrying this code. The wood of the boomerang has no idea that it is returning. The flour has no idea it is in a cake.

When we see these, we see clear signs of intelligent creation. So who created people? We know that ultimately, our great God takes the credit for the creation. I thank Him even for the cheesecake. I hope these words help you, as they have me, in your journey to surely trust the Creator.

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

“I realized that, remarkably, the Bible and science agree completely.”



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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

# HOLINESS

BY JODY BENNETT

## Becoming a peacemaker

BY ROB FURLONG

You don't have to look very far in our world today to see how lacking we are in peace and peacemakers.

Right now, as you read this, there are 22 wars being waged around the world, on five separate continents, resulting in the deaths of 120,151 people in 2022 alone. Some of these conflicts have been going on for decades.

Closer to home, many of us have no peace in our personal lives or relationships. Perhaps a friend at school has turned against you or you are no longer speaking to a relative because of an argument neither of you can resolve.

Many people perpetually live their lives with a profound sense of deep sadness, emotional hurt and estrangement from God and people.

Whether it be in our world, or our personal lives, more than ever we need to experience and practice what Jesus taught about peace and being a peacemaker.

Through His life and teaching, Jesus brought "peace on earth" – and He showed how peace in our relationships with God and others can be a reality in our lives and our world.

Last month I spoke about being a peacemaker and I suggested that one way you could do this was by committing yourself to the "Peace Declaration" I had written. Because I want peace to be more than just a nice sentiment on a piece of paper, I am going to focus on the theme of peace this year.

How can we have peace with God? How can we experience peace in our relationships with others and how can we actively promote peace in them?

You see, I want you to know God's peace deep in your soul.

**Being a peacemaker begins with me.**

What this means is, if I'm serious about being a peacemaker with others and the world, then I must begin by making peace with God.

People who have peace with God are described by Jesus as being "blessed" people – people who are aware of their need before God – and who demonstrate the following characteristics:

- They know they are spiritually bankrupt. To be "poor in spirit" means they know their attitude



toward God doesn't measure up and their relationship with Him is broken. As a result, they turn to God and ask Him for His mercy.

- They grieve over their sin. They "mourn" and are in deep grief over the blackness of their own sin against God, as well as the sins of the world.

- They are dependent on God. When Jesus describes blessed people as being "meek", He is not calling them weak. A meek person is someone who knows they are strong, but God is stronger. Instead of living life in their own strength, they choose to live in dependence on God.

A meek person submits themselves completely to God and His care.

- They long for a righteousness they don't have. Blessed people want to be like God. They know they are not good in themselves, so they ask God to fill them with His goodness.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)

When a person realizes their sin has broken their relationship with God and there is nothing they can do to repair it; when they confess their sin to God, ask for His forgiveness and rely only on the death and resurrection of Jesus to bring this about – that person has peace with God.

God's promise to you is that His Son, Jesus, can bring peace to your life and your relationships, and you can be a peacemaker in our world.

God offers us peace in exchange for our anger, resentments, and fears - He offers you His peace, freely, today.

Blessed are those who realize their need of God because that is the beginning of peace in their lives.

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A	T	T	E	S	T	W	E	L	D								

## HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

**What?** Salvation is an eternal relationship with God – now on Earth, and after we die, in Heaven.

*The Lord Jesus says: "I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in me has eternal life." John 6:47*

*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. John 16:33*

**Who?** Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ, regardless of how you have previously lived or what you have previously believed.

*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*

**Why?** Because sin separates us from a holy God. Sin is all the wrong things we do, say and think, as well as our desire to be our own boss.

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23*

**How?** The Bible says you become a Christian by confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead.

*If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Romans 10:8b-10*

**Ready to change your life forever?** Here is a prayer you can pray, but you can also use your own words. The words are not as important as the heart attitude – which only God can see.

Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,

I acknowledge that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for all the ways I have disobeyed and defied You.

Thank you for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to live the perfect life I couldn't, and die on the cross for my sins. Thank you that His blood was sufficient to pay my debt to You, and His resurrection proves that there is life beyond death. I accept that His sacrifice is all I need to get right with You - I bring nothing I have done but I give you everything I am. Help me to live for You. Please be my Saviour and my Master. Amen.

**What now?**

1. Tell someone - either a Christian that you know or email us at [usaoffice@challengenews.org](mailto:usaoffice@challengenews.org)
2. Use the resources in the green box on this page to find a Bible to read and more information regarding Christianity.
3. Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening and you don't need a formula.
4. Find a Bible-teaching church to attend.

**AS A NEXT STEP:**

I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

- Bible  
 Some 'starting off' literature  
 Information on a helpful church

\* Please tick and write clearly \*

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Age, occupation (it helps) \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: Challenge Literature Fellowship, 2634 Drake Road, Lebanon Ohio, 45036  
[usaoffice@challengenews.org](mailto:usaoffice@challengenews.org)

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

## Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, online Christian resources:

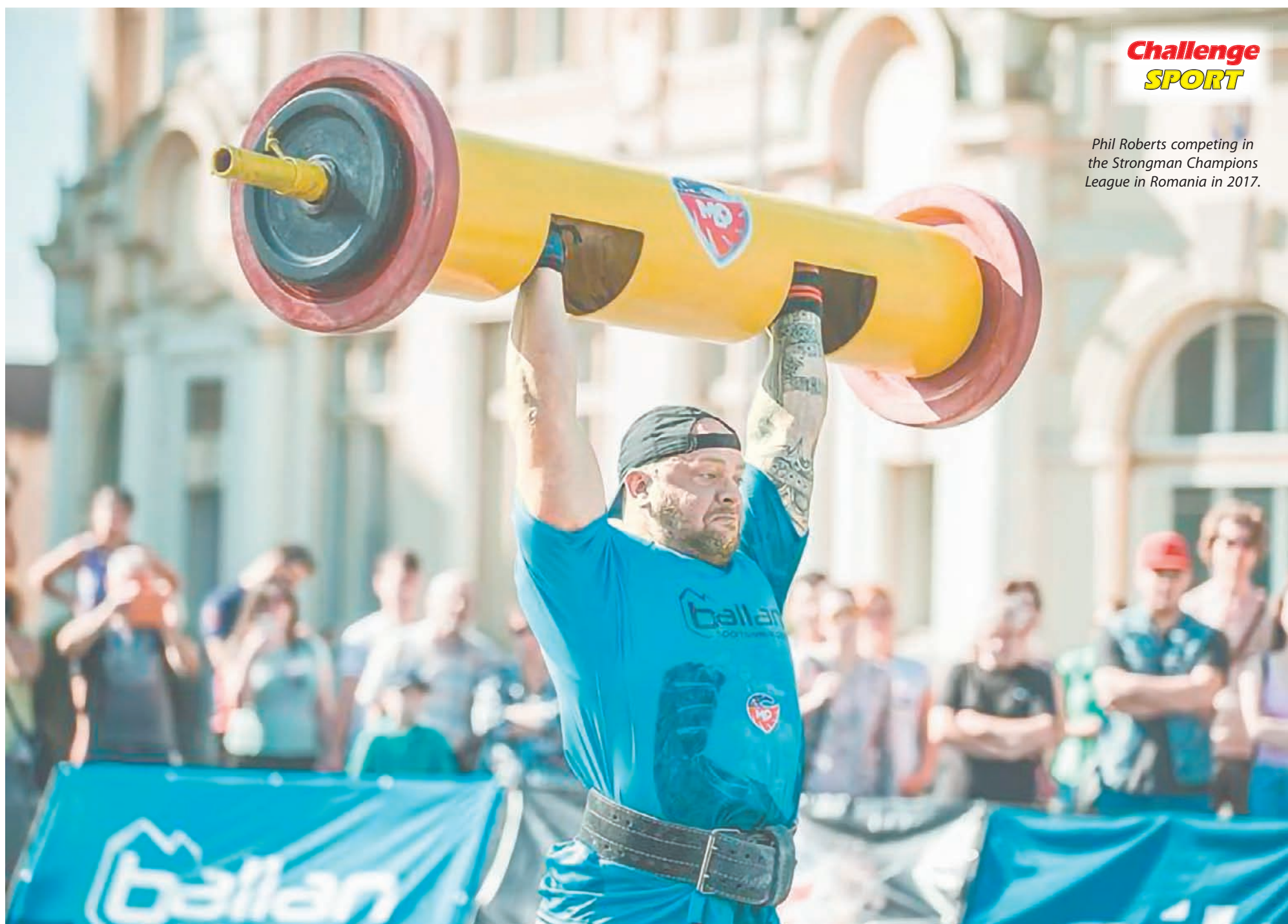
Online Bible - <b>Olive Tree app</b> (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	
Audio Bible - <b>Bible.is app</b> , or <b>Youversion Bible app</b>	
Christian radio station - <b>CBN radio app</b> (different channels for all genres of music)	
Christian podcasts and sermons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

"I shall pass through this world but once. Any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."  
 - Scottish evangelist Henry Drummond

You won't become a saint by studying your Bible; you'll become a saint by living it.  
 Leonard Ravenhill

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





# STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

In 2017, Sheffield policeman Phil Roberts was crowned Britain's Strongest Man.

Winning this competition was no mean feat. The 32-year-old had to beat his opponents in events such as flipping a 880 lbs tractor tyre, lifting a car and pulling a plane. At 6'2 tall and weighing 293 lbs, he was built like a mountain.

Yet while he was as physically as strong as they came, emotionally Phil was as weak as a child.

"It looked on the outside that I had everything, but I didn't feel fulfilled," he says on the YouTube channel Life Stories. "I felt empty."

Emptiness had plagued him ever since he was 22, when his best friend hanged himself.

Until then Phil had been a casual churchgoer, but this tragedy caused him to turn his back on God.

"I couldn't understand how a good God could allow that to happen and that's when I decided I was done with God and would live my life my way to the full — or at least what I thought was to the full," he says. "I can't say I'm proud of the next 13 years."

Those were the party years, the hard drug (cocaine, heroin, lots of steroids) and hard drinking years.

He even got engaged and bought a house with his fiancée but was unfaithful to her and they broke up.

By this time Phil was a police officer, but had become disillusioned with the job and chalked up the most

complaints of anyone in the South Yorkshire Police Force.

Where did it go wrong, he asked himself?

"I went from wanting to help and protect the vulnerable to being one of the most violent men in the force. I left a trail of disaster behind me and slipped into depression."

Phil tried to pick himself up by throwing himself into weight training and competing in novice strongman competitions.

Bolstered by some early victories, he went all out to win the major titles, which resulted in his 2017 win.

This launched him into the glamorous world of women, sports cars, penthouse apartments and lucrative sponsorship deals.

But still this brought him no lasting joy — instead he describes his success as hollow.

His use of hard drugs, which included copious amounts of steroids, continued.

In 2019, Phil decided to defend his title.

By this time, he weighed 335 lbs. "I was having the worst competition I've ever had. I was so big and so uncomfortable because I put on that weight very quickly.

"The steroids and recreational drugs I was taking put my body under huge pressure — it's by the grace of God that I didn't just pop."

The last event of the competition rolled around — the Atlas stone lift, in which competitors have to lift

five huge round stones, increasing in weight from 220 to 353 lbs, and place them on five high platforms.

He got through the first four but slipped while lifting the final and heaviest stone. It dropped.

The 353 lbs rock crashed onto Phil's shin bone, which broke with a sickening crack.

"I knew instantly it was bad," he says. "It sounded like a massive branch breaking off a tree."

When surgeons told him his injuries were so severe he could lose his leg, Phil's world disintegrated.

"I went from being one of the strongest people on earth to the vulnerable little boy I was growing up. I was terrified," he shares.

"All I could think of was that I would lose my business and my livelihood.

"I realized everything I'd built my life on, things that never gave me real happiness or joy in the first place, could vanish overnight."

However, Phil had some friends who were Christians. They reached out to him during this time and invited him to a Christian men's retreat.

"At that point I was so desperate I said I'd take anything, so I went, but this time I wasn't my confident cocky self. I was in pain; my leg was being held together by this massive cage. I was miserable."

While he was there, one of the speakers approached Phil and said to him: "Why don't you give this God thing a go? Give Jesus a chance."

Willing to try anything, he said to himself: "Yeah, why not give Jesus a go?" It really was as casual as that!

He says slowly but surely things

started to change. "I didn't know much about God at all. I thought He was cruel and Jesus was just some kind of nice guy.

"I knew I had to change — I wanted to change — but I was kind of straddling the Christian life and the old life. But God was so gracious; He was so patient. He gave me grace [undeserved love]. He is a loving father, the best Father ever.

"I can genuinely say today that on reflection the day of the accident was the best day of my life, though not at the time, of course. But it was when I realized that all these things that you've spent so much time and effort on can be taken away from you in an instant.

"God has given me the purpose and meaning I've always looked for."



Right: Phil Roberts doing the Atlas stone lift.

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