

THIS NEWSPAPER IS NOT FOR RESALE

us.challenge.news

# WHOLESOME HUMOR

## Tanzanian American funny man pokes holes in church fakery

For people who think either that the church is full of stuffed shirts with no sense of humor, or that it is full of smiley fakes with no self-awareness, comedian Shama Mrema is a breath of fresh air.

With a background as a church planter's kid in Africa, a Bible college student in South Carolina, and a brief stint as a youth pastor, Sharma's life experience has given him plenty of fodder for some hilarious, but yet respectful, fun poking at American Christianity.

Shama Mrema is Tanzanian born and American raised. The actor, writer, YouTuber, comedian and rapper, says he has been to hundreds of different churches. "I saw the gamut of everything, all the craziest experiences," the 30-year-old said.

Shama is among many other irreverent content producers like Tim Hawkins, John Crist, Ken Davis, and the Babylon Bee, who all make sure Christians don't take themselves too seriously, while still maintaining respect for their faith.

Shama, also known as Shama Llama, has over 275,000 combined online followers across social media and over 50 million views on his videos. His viral content includes everything from tongue-in-cheek takes on evangelical culture, to catchy songs, and his own podcast.



ABOVE: Shama Mrema hams it up in his Church Aerobics skit.

ABOVE LEFT: Shama Mrema with his wife Grace and their three children, Ezra, Zoey, and Lucy.

Shama said he has "deep respect" for the Church. He himself became a Christian very young. "I was saved at the age of 5 but rededicated my life to God at the age of 15. Why? Well, I grew up in the home of a pastor. We prayed for every meal... We had devotions as a family every night and we faithfully attended our local church. ... Heck, I attended church while I was in womb. Yup. My par-

ents were those types of Christians. Not that it's a bad thing. But to a teenage kid who's main concern was looking cool, having "Jesus Freak" parents wasn't the most flattering thing," he wrote in 2012 on his blogspot.

But 15 "was the age that God opened my eyes to realize the power and realness of salvation. It was then that I realized what Christianity is.

It wasn't ... sitting in Mrs. Peggy's Sunday school "class" ... It wasn't memorizing John 3:16 ... Christianity is believing In Christ. Repenting of your sins. And above all knowing without a shadow of a doubt that there is a God who heard, forgave, and delivered you. Boom. Simple as that."

In another enlightening post, in 2013, Sharma wrote about why he

wanted to be famous: "Young people especially young Christians admire a filthy mouth rapper, a slutty female celeb, or a boy band before they admire anyone who's saved. That needs to change.

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### Fun for Kids

Pages 5,6,7

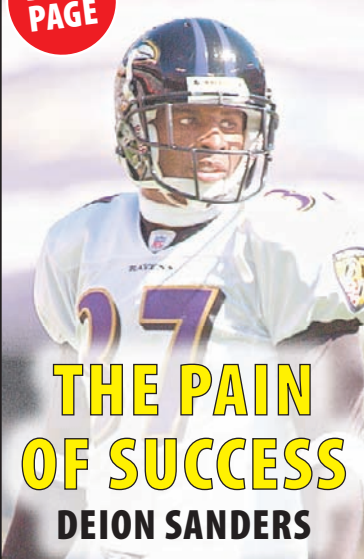


### Youth Truth

Pages 9 and 10



BACK PAGE



THE PAIN OF SUCCESS  
DEION SANDERS

# My beef with the series Beef

BY HARRIET COOMBE

**HAVE** you heard of the new Netflix television series *Beef*?

I had heard it was wildly popular and thought I would check it out.

It's a dark comedy drama series by Korean director Lee Sung Jin. In the first episode, we are introduced to the titular "beef" – Danny and Amy are involved in a road rage incident. Neither will let the incident go, and the strangers quickly become enemies. Over the course of the season, their acts of revenge only escalate.

Without wanting to give too much away, the series does not end well for anyone.

After watching *Beef*, I cannot recommend it. It's incredibly graphic in parts. Having said that, I found some of the themes interesting and it got me thinking about how it may have ended differently had the characters embraced forgiveness rather than revenge.

In episode three, Danny visits a church. The church band starts to play *Oh Come to the Altar* by



Elevation Worship. The words of the song speak to Danny, who has hit rock-bottom:

"Are you hurting and broken within? Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin? Jesus is calling.

"Have you come to the end of yourself? Do you thirst for a drink from the well? Jesus is calling.

"O come to the altar, the Father's arms are open wide. Forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

"Leave behind your regrets and mistakes. Come

today, there's no reason to wait. Jesus is calling.

"Bring your sorrows and trade them for joy. From the ashes, a new life is born. Jesus is calling..."

Danny is overwhelmed with emotion and breaks down during the song. He explains to a family member later that he "had an encounter with God". But the remaining seven episodes make it clear that while he may have had a moment with God, he didn't give his life to Him or allow God to change him.

But what if he had? What if he put his faith and trust in Jesus as his Lord and Savior? What if he received Jesus' gift of forgiveness of his sins and chose to forgive Amy in turn? It would have been a much shorter television series but I'm sure it would have had a much happier ending!

So what does it mean to forgive someone? It's not saying that what was done to you doesn't matter or is okay. I like Tim Sledge's definition from his book, *Making Peace with Your Past*: "Forgiveness means that you no longer regard the offending person as indebted to you."

● Turn to page 2

# God's most often repeated commandment

BY DAVID WECKER (ABRIDGED)

**MY** faith story is not of a record-scratch experience where my life abruptly spun around 180 degrees in a single moment. For me, asking Jesus into my life has happened over a series of realizations. It has been a process and continues to be.

I grew up in a loving family with parents who were active in our small town Lutheran church. We sat down to dinner together and always thanked God for our meal with this simple prayer:

*Let all of us in full accord  
Give grateful thanks unto the Lord,  
A very kind and gracious Lord  
Who gives us more than our reward.*

That was my foundation. I often strayed, often thought only of myself, even when I knew I was wrong, even when I knew I was engaging in dangerous behavior.

But I never doubted the existence of God. Or that Jesus was God, as in the Son of God. I've never doubted He is a loving God, one who gives us control of our lives through the gift of free will.

A world without God and all the things in it didn't make logical sense – to the point I have taken Him for granted. I've always known He was there, although there were long stretches when I was less aware of Him than I wish I had been.

So I'm grateful for the moments when He has reminded me. One such moment came at a men's retreat at Camp Northward about 17 years ago. The speaker's sermon that night



was about "God's most often-repeated commandment."

What was the one thing, more than any other, that God wanted his people to keep in mind? I had no idea. The answer stunned me: "Fear not."

There He was, the Creator of the universe, God of everything I could ever see or imagine, the one and only God who created beauty and gave us eyes to see

it, saying that the one thing in His Bible that He wanted me to know more than anything was that I can and should trust Him, no matter what – and in that trust, I don't need to be afraid of anything ever.

That is the message – not "Thou shall this" or "Thou shall not that" – more than any other that He wants us to take to heart. I tried to understand the vastness, breadth and depth of the oceans of love that motivate "Fear not." Having no fear – that's pretty close to my idea of heaven.

I'm one of those who's in progress. Two steps forward, one back.

Do I still worry, even knowing that worry comes from fear? Sometimes, but less than before.

And whatever my temporary state of mind might be, I'm filled with gratitude every day to God for including me in His plan – and to Jesus for patiently helping me discover what my purpose for being born might be.

This article first appeared on godpreports.com and is used with kind permission.



## WHOLESOME HUMOR

● From page 1

"Being respectfully admired is a great platform for ministry. It doesn't matter if you have something great to say if nobody wants to hear you. I want to be heard. With the Lord's help, I will be. On more than just a local or national level. Disagree? No big deal. Get out the way, I'm hauling some big dreams."

And he has seen so many of them come true already.

"I want to see churches succeed," he said. "It's never been an option for me to think about pushing the envelope."

But he does encourage Christians to be authentic, and avoid clichés and lazy thinking. His song, "The Worship Song Song by Random Action Verb Worship," calls out common worship music tropes, including the lyrics, "Life's got me down/ I'm at the end of my rope/ so here's an out-of-context verse about hope."

However, Shama's content is empathetic to those who have experienced church hurt – something he knows about after being "released" from his position as a youth pastor at a church he used to attend.

"I set out to do ministry and I got fired from church!" he shared on a Good-Lion podcast. However, the numbers of people he has touched through his videos and podcast downloads since "have achieved more than I could ever been able to do had I just served in a local church. So, God had the final laugh!"

"[That experience] does inform a lot of what I put out," he said. "There were a lot of expectations placed on the role of being a student pastor, and I loved the kids. I loved spending time with them, but that almost took a backseat."

Shama said when he asked the leadership for money to support the youth group he led, he was told, "We can't invest too much into student ministry, because none of them tithe. They don't even support the church."

However, the comedian says he doesn't want to give fodder to the people who watch his videos spoofing church culture and inevitably quip, "See, this is why I left."

He hopes his comedy provides a way for people to process their experiences but hold onto their faith.

And though acknowledging that some of the criticism levelled at evangelical culture is fair, Shama is quick to point out that the Church has also done a "great job" of fostering creatives.

"I'm a by-product of that," he said.

He expressed hope that more clean, quality content will be created – by him and others.

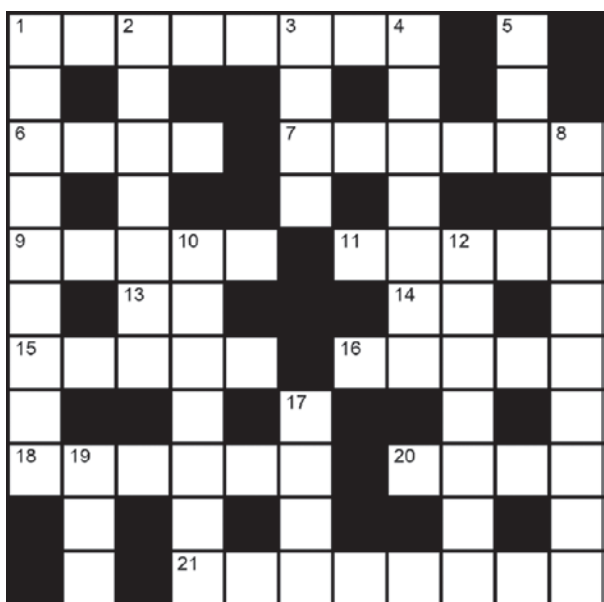
Shama is married to Grace and they have three children, Ezra, Zoey and Lucy.

Check out his content on the Church Stories podcast, or on Instagram or TikTok as shama4realz. See all Shama's links at [bio.link/shama](https://bio.link/shama).

## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

### ACROSS

- 1 Subordinate set
- 6 Shaved part of the neck, perhaps
- 7 Albania's capital
- 9 Open-mouthed
- 11 Type in data
- 13 Mexico's continent: abbr.
- 14 "Catch Me \_\_\_ You Can"
- 15 Follows an order
- 16 Asparagus stalk
- 18 Inter, as a pharaoh
- 20 Plank imperfection
- 21 US casino capital (3,5)



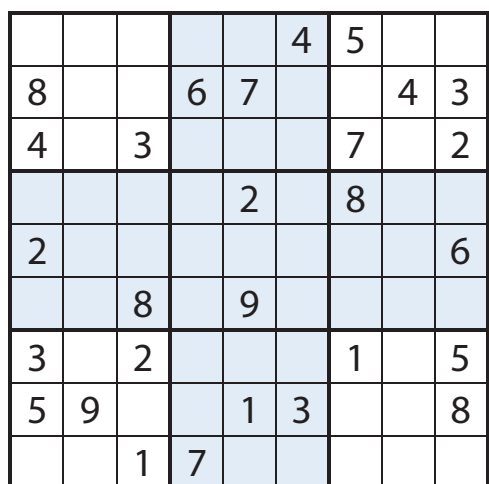
### DOWN

- 1 Island nation in SE Asia
- 2 Double-winged aircraft
- 3 Horse feed
- 4 Vegetable that looks like a white carrot
- 5 Money in Japan
- 8 Joint inflammation
- 10 Employees' due
- 12 Old German monetary unit
- 17 Bird seen in hieroglyphics
- 19 Granny, to a Brit.

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



"Do you two have a history?"



● From page 1

So what does it mean to forgive someone? It's not saying that what was done to you doesn't matter or is okay. I like Tim Sledge's definition from his book, *Making Peace with Your Past*: "Forgiveness means that you no longer regard the offending person as indebted to you."

Forgiveness is not letting someone off the hook – it is giving them to God and trusting Him to deal with them. When you forgive someone, it doesn't mean no one pays for what they did, it means you acknowledge that Someone already has.

When Jesus died on the cross, He died for everything you have done wrong as well as everything everyone else has done wrong. He died for the very things we struggle to forgive. If we refuse to forgive, it's as if we are saying that Jesus' sacrifice wasn't enough to pay for this particular sin.

Danny and Amy's beef starts as smaller prank-style acts of revenge, but it increases to dangerous heights. I'm sure there was a point at which both of them would have said that forgiveness was impossible. When I think about forgiving the impossible, I think about Corrie ten Boom.

Corrie and her family helped many Jewish people escape from the Nazis during the Holocaust in World War

II by hiding them in their home. But they were caught and Corrie and her sister Betsie were arrested and sent to a concentration camp, where Betsie was killed.

After the war, Corrie became an author and public speaker. In her book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie describes the time the guard who had taken her sister's life approached her after her talk. He asked her if she believed what she had just said about forgiveness. She nodded and he extended his hand and asked her to forgive him.

Corrie froze. She did not have the ability to even reach out her hand, so she prayed and asked Jesus to help her. In that moment she felt God's forgiveness flow through her, down her arm and into her extended hand.

Corrie forgave the man who killed her sister. Corrie said, "Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart." That means forgiveness is possible, despite how you feel.

Like Corrie, we can ask God to help us to forgive the impossible. But first, ask Him to forgive you for how you have wronged Him. (See the prayer on page 11 as a guide.)

Please note, forgiveness doesn't mean allowing abusive behaviour to continue – you can forgive and put boundaries in place to protect yourself and/or those around you.

## More than remorse

BY GREG LAURIE

**IF** I were to get in my car and go down the freeway at 140 miles per hour, I would be remorseful if the highway patrol pulled me over. Why? Because I'd pay a penalty for my choices. I'd get a ticket and maybe even spend the night in jail. And my insurance rates would go up significantly.

But if I were to get in my car and do the same thing the next day, it would show that I was not repentant, not willing to turn away from my wrongdoing.

There's a difference between remorse and repentance. Sometimes we confuse the two. We're remorseful when we're sorry for getting caught. But we're repentant when we're sorry enough to stop doing that thing.

A lot of people feel remorse. Maybe someone traps them in a lie or catches them stealing. Or they sin in some other way, and it catches up with them eventually. Thus, they're remorseful. But do they change their behaviour?

If they simply plot a little more carefully the next time and hope they won't get caught, that's not repentance; that's just remorse.

The Bible says: "For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

If you can continue on a course of sin despite feeling guilty about it; that tells me you don't know God.

Maybe you've never given your life to Jesus. Maybe there has never been a moment in your life when you said, "Lord, I'm sorry for my sin, sorry enough to turn away from it." Perhaps you've been sorry because you've been found out, but are you willing to turn away from that sin and put your faith in Jesus?

Jesus is telling us, "Friend, I love you, and I'm reaching out to you." But you must reach out as well and take His hand. Have you done that yet? Today is as good a day as any to grasp the hand of salvation.

"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you." - Author Lewis B. Smedes

## My beef with the series Beef

● From page 1

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# Iranian loves what he once despised

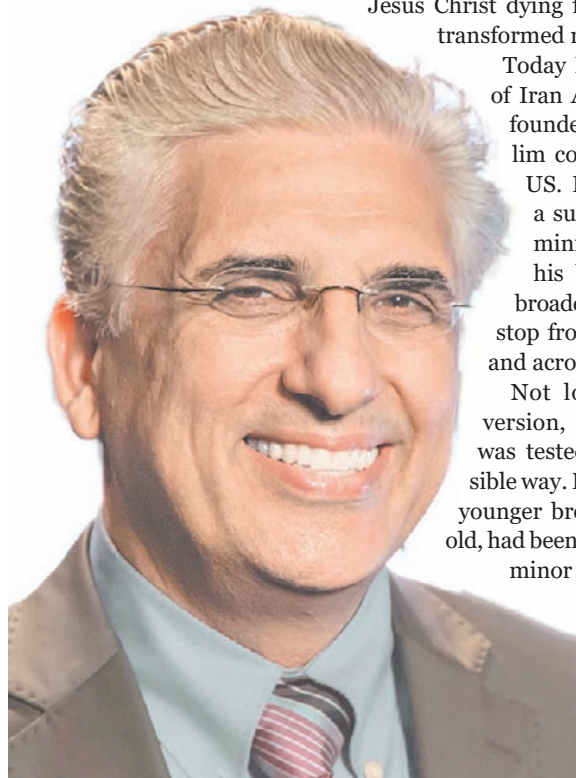
**H**ormoz Shariat hated the US and everything it stood for. Born into a devout Muslim family in Iran, he used to pound the streets of Tehran shouting “Death to America”!

Then he moved to America to earn his PhD in artificial intelligence and suddenly went through a period of “spiritual questioning” which saw him seesaw wildly between his faith in Islam and a newfound interest in the Bible, Jesus Christ and Christianity.

He said the Quran, which had guided his life to this point “didn’t add anything to me” and he began reading the Bible. However, Hormoz was confident that he would not find anything new in it because he felt “the Quran is the most complete book and Islam is the best religion”.

He soon changed his mind. After reading the book of Matthew in the New Testament, he found himself struggling with the person of Jesus Christ, who he said was “so different from the prophet that Islam teaches us about.

“I struggled for hours, for days, re-reading Matthew, trying to figure out this person of Jesus,” he said. “After a few months of struggle, somebody invited me to a church in downtown Los Angeles. That’s where I heard this simple message of the Gospel (the good news of Jesus Christ dying for our sins), which transformed my life.”



Hormoz Shariat

Today Hormoz is the head of Iran Alive Ministries and founder of the largest Muslim convert church in the US. He runs a blog and a successful satellite TV ministry to the land of his birth. The ministry broadcasts the Gospel non-stop from its studio to Iran and across the Middle East.

Not long after his conversion, Hormoz’ new faith was tested in the worst possible way. He received word his younger brother, only 16 years old, had been arrested in Iran on a minor political charge and was sentenced to two years in jail.

“I prayed and asked God to please save him,” Hormoz said. “The Iranian government kept telling my mother they

were going to release him, but one day they called her and said, ‘Come get his body. We just shot him. And by the way, you need to pay for the bullets.’ They charged her to release his body!”

A deep anger burned in Hormoz as he asked God why his prayers weren’t answered. Thoughts of vengeance kept him awake at night and fuelled his days.

“But God said to me ‘vengeance is mine’. I told God okay but I really hate them. Can I curse to feel better? And God said to me ‘no, you can’t even do that because with your mouth you must worship and not swear. You are to love your enemies’.

“I said, ‘What is this? There is injustice in this world, and I am not allowed to do anything?’ That’s when God spoke to me and said, ‘The best thing to do is share the Gospel. Those who killed your brother are not your enemies. They are captives in the hands of the enemy.’

“That is where I got my life calling. I said, ‘OK, I’m going to start sharing the Gospel with Muslims. It’s Your job to save them, but I can share the Gospel with them.’”

“My goal was to share the Gospel with over 1 million Muslims,” Hormoz said. “By God’s grace, through media, I have passed this number multiple times. We have the names of over 37,000 people who have received Christ, and we know there are several hundred thousand who have made decisions but haven’t been able to tell us.”

The testimony section on his website, [www.iranaliveministries.org](http://www.iranaliveministries.org), is filled with accounts of miraculous healings and divine intervention.

One of them is by a 42-year-old man given the pseudonym Ebrahim. This is his story:

“At 15 I was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison. In prison, my fingers were cut off. I suffered from great pain, leading to my drug and alcohol addiction after I was released. Drowning in pain and despair I started watching your TV program. I could not believe what you were saying and did not enjoy your programs at first. Yet something pushed me to keep watching. One night I decided to call and pray with someone to receive Christ (commit my life to Jesus).

“Missing fingers do not hurt me anymore. I am not ashamed of my life or my physical appearance. I am now free from all addiction to drugs and alcohol. God has brought healing in my family and a deep unity...I am forever grateful for your TV programs for the chance to experience God’s hope, love and joy.”

Stories of miracles and of Jesus appearing in dreams, are not uncommon, said Hormoz. “Jesus appears through visions, dreams and miracles. Sometimes I feel these days if you want to see Jesus, you have to be a Muslim!” •

# Escape from brutality



Mariana Cuza with her husband Mihai and their daughter.

BY JANICE TEO

**S**hivering and terrified, 21-year-old Mariana Cuza slid silently into the freezing waves of the River Danube.

She swallowed her terror because she knew it was now or never to escape from Communist Romania to freedom in Yugoslavia.

Death was a real possibility — thousands have died attempting that same crossing.

“I couldn’t afford to feel fear. I could not waver,” the 60-year-old businesswoman, who now lives in Perth, tells *Challenge News*.

Mariana lived in Romania during dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu’s rule.

By the time she was 20 she’d been beaten, gang raped regularly by Ceaușescu’s leaders and officers, held at gunpoint by the secret police and imprisoned for “inciting political unrest”.

Mariana’s worried mother prayed constantly for her. Her father was a lay pastor so Mariana had heard about God her whole life but pictured Him as harsh and cruel.

Deciding that Christianity was not for her, she focussed on getting a good education, surviving, escaping and saving her family when she was settled elsewhere.

She survived the swim across the Danube, and was resettled in Australia in 1983.

For the next five years Mariana worked two jobs and saved enough money to bring her whole family over.

However, her happiness at being reunited with her father was short-lived; seven weeks after arriving in Australia he died on his knees while reading his Bible.

“I really got so angry at God,” Mariana admits. “I turned to other spiritual teachings.”

She tried Buddhism, transcendental meditation — and most bizarre of all — a belief in extra-terrestrials which involved New Age practices like astral projection and ‘joining’ with spirit beings.

“I joined an ashram in Melbourne. I was cuckoo for a while,” she laughs.

Mariana’s mother and brother Natanael, now a pastor in Perth, prayed and fasted for years “for God to get me out of Babylon. I was in spiritual darkness”.

Mariana has had a challenging life. Her husband Mihai was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis four weeks before she gave birth to their daughter. He was told he only had

five years, maybe less, to live.

“That made me even madder with God!” Mariana says. “I told Him ‘You gave me a child but You take my husband. Punish me if You want, but leave them alone!’”

Mihai had a nervous breakdown. After he recovered the couple decided to move to Perth for a fresh start.

“It was a very, very difficult and stressful time,” Mariana shares. “I was depressed and desperate and went even more deeply into meditation.”

One day a church flyer landed in her mailbox. “Come to Faith Factory and enjoy some Tim-Tams!” it read.

None of the other religions had brought Mariana the peace she sought so “I thought ‘why not try Jesus?’”

She describes what happened that Sunday.

“The minute I walked in I cried non-stop. There was a woman speaker — I had never seen a woman speaker before.

“That was absolutely central to my coming back to Jesus because I had been abused and betrayed by so many men when I was younger. But with a woman speaker at this church I felt safe.

“I cried so much because Jesus brought this conviction to my heart — I knew Him, knew of Him but I had gone away so far. At this church I felt God’s love, His acceptance, His peace. No condemnation at all.”

But Mariana’s battles were not yet over. Doctors found a tumour on her spine and gave her a 50-50 chance of surviving. They advised her to make arrangements for her daughter as Mihai by this time had 3000 lesions on his brain.

The night before her surgery Mariana tried to read her Bible.

“But nothing made sense,” she says. “It was like eating sand.”

She went to her backyard and sobbed her heart out.

“I saw all the stupid things I had done like my New Age

worship. I remembered the hurtful things I’d said to Mihai because of the strain of looking after him.

“I felt so guilty. How could Jesus even look at someone like me? I felt no-one in the world was as bad a sinner as me. I just wanted to disappear under the weight of my sin.”

A sudden breeze made her look up from her tears. “That’s when I saw this most beautiful light in every tree in the garden. I smelt the most beautiful fragrance. And then I became completely enveloped in the love of God. That was the absolute turning point in my faith.”

The surgery that was supposed to take up to 10 hours the next day took less than five minutes. Her tumour was completely benign and the pain never bothered her again.

Today Mariana, who runs her own non-toxic cleaning business, is an active and devoted Christian. She serves at

her church in Perth and travels regularly to share how God has changed her life.

“God has made all the difference,” she says. “In New Age it is always your responsibility to connect with the ‘higher power’. You have to fast more, do more, vibrate more.

“God is exactly the opposite. As you yield to Him, He takes the responsibility to mould you. He is the author and finisher of our faith. Him, not us.”

Mihai still has MS but has outlived all earlier predictions.

Mariana says she used to ask God why he was so sick but now realises that’s the wrong question. “It’s not ‘why’ but ‘what’. What should I do? What good can I do in this situation?”

“How can I be used by God to show His glory?”

“I had never seen a woman speaker before!”



Mariana and Mihai Cuza.

Peter Yeo

# DICING WITH DEATH

BY JANICE TEO

**H**epatitis at 13 years old. Two heart attacks, skin cancer, testicular cancer, anaemia. Diagnosed with leukaemia at 48, Peter Yeo was given 10 years to live but was told bluntly by his doctors he would probably die long before that.

Remarkably, the former journalist from Singapore defied the odds and lived beyond 10 years — but then at 62 was told he had idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), an incurable lung disease.

Peter had non-medical brushes with death too. In 1984 the plane he was in plunged mid-air with its wings aflame. Fortunately it landed safely and there were no casualties.

In 1997 he was flung five metres from his motorbike after a head-on collision, breaking his back, wrist and clavicle and cracking his pelvis.

Peter has danced with death so much he once quipped: “I now have no fear of death — I have become used to it. I’ve had practice.”

Instead, he tells *Challenge News*, he decided he would continue as he had always done with bad news — “I was just going to live as well as I could with whatever time I had left.

“Every year of my life, long or short, is dedicated to God.”

Now 77 and living in Seattle, the ex-newspaper editor and public relations consultant used to be as hard-nosed and foul-mouthed as they come. His excesses were legendary. He drank, he smoked, he womanised.

## Never out of reach

BY GREG LAURIE

**ALICE** Cooper was at one time the most famous and successful rock star in the world. His given name was Vincent Furnier, but as a young man, he joined a rock band and changed his name to Alice Cooper.

At his concerts, Alice Cooper was known for spectacle and for being a dark figure. In reality, though, much of it was only an act. Over time, however, Vincent turned into Alice Cooper. He became an alcoholic and then a drug addict.

The amazing thing was that Alice Cooper was the son of a pastor, and he was running away from God. He ran so far away from God that people thought he had reached the point of no return. But God wasn't done with him. One day, when he was overdosing on cocaine, he looked into a mirror and thought he saw blood coming out of his eyes. He was hallucinating.

Alice Cooper cried out to God. He then took the softball-sized rock of cocaine that he had and flushed it down the toilet. God heard his prayer and turned him around. Since then, he has been walking with the Lord. He has been clean and sober for many years. Today, he seems to be addicted only to golf. He loves to get out on the course. But his faith in Jesus Christ reminds us that no one is beyond God's reach.

Maybe you've made some bad decisions in your life. Maybe because of some things you've done, you're thinking, “It's too late for me.” But it's never too late for you. God can turn your life around, just as He turned Alice Cooper's life around. God can forgive your sin. God can refresh you, replenish you, and revive you. But you must turn to Him.

“I am the Lord, the God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27 NLT)

“I drank every day,” he shares. “If I was happy, I drank. If I was depressed, I drank.”

He admits he was a godless man even though he was brought up in church and had committed his life to Christ as a teenager.

“But I rejected God when I discovered the world of wine, women, and song,” Peter says. “I preferred the pleasures of the flesh ... it was too much of a sacrifice to return to a holy life.”

“Anyone would think I had ‘arrived’! But I felt I had no anchor and life seemed meaningless.”

Then something happened that changed Peter into a fulfilled person with an unshakeable belief in God.

In 1989 and 1991 he had surgery, and both times while under anaesthetic felt himself floating above his own body.

“I felt I had no anchor and life seemed meaningless.”

“I was in total darkness,” Peter says, describing the experience, “I saw a bright patch flying towards me then I was sucked into a dark tunnel. It was a scary experience but when I woke up I dismissed it as a dream.”

The second time, he saw himself at a party. “I wanted to leave, but someone said: ‘Come on, one for the road.’ I heard myself protesting that I had to get home to my family, but they kept saying: ‘One more, one more.’”

“Then I saw myself driving home but I could never get there. Instead I found myself at another party and I realised I was going through a tormenting playback of my sinful life. I knew I was dead — and heard a cold voice echoing my thoughts: ‘You are dead.’”

Somehow, Peter knew that voice was the devil. He spoke into the void: “You mean there is a God after all?” The voice replied: “Yes”.

“I was terrified. I suddenly realised God does exist and so does the devil and punishment for those who refuse to believe in God.

“My wife says that I had a look of terror on my face when I woke up.”

Peter was greatly affected by this second experience. He wondered if it was a warning from God or a hallucination.

Yet he still didn't change his lifestyle —until another frightening encounter which occurred while he was fully conscious.

He was in his car when the same weightlessness and darkness engulfed him. “I thought ‘is this what it feels like to die’ and I panicked. I wasn't ready. I had not changed my life after my hospital encounter, but after this one I finally pleaded with God: ‘I don't want to die! Not yet, not yet!’”

“I needed no more convincing that there is a God — and a hell for sinners. I spoke to a Christian friend and prayed to the Lord for forgiveness. I invited Jesus Christ back into my life, and felt a great burden being lifted from me.”

That signalled a complete turnaround in Peter's life. He began praying, reading the Bible and worshipping God.

He joined the Christian Business Men's Committee, went back to his childhood church and served in many ministries.

Peter is now in hospice care as his lungs have deteriorated badly. But there is no fear or sadness.

Speaking of how God changed his life, he says: “After I received Christ, my life finally had real meaning and richness as I came to understand our purpose on earth is to share the good news of the kingdom of God.

“God has taken away my worries over tomorrow. I know He hates sin and punishes sinners but He is a merciful God, prepared to forgive even the most ‘hopeless’ sinner. I am an example of that wretched person who refused to believe in God and who now has an unshakeable faith in Him.

“Today I believe. Today, I know with certainty God lives and there is life after death: I have been there — and back.”

# Google, help me!

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

**I**ntava typed into Google “How do you heal a crushed spirit and a broken heart?” and the search engine culled two articles. One was scientifically corroborated — take aspirin. The other seemed more difficult — repent and turn to Jesus.

Born in San Francisco, Intava grew up in a family that immigrated from Laos to America. They worshipped Buddha and a host of other gods. In fact, everything had a god. If you wanted your locker at school to be watched over, you prayed to the locker god. If you need a parking spot, there's a god for that.

Because she grew up in America, she became familiar with the Ten Commandments. She decided to combine them with the Buddhist rules.

“I did the Christian rules. I did the Buddhist rules,” Intava (22) says on her channel, The Peace Board. “I thought I was a good person. I'm totally going to Heaven. The Buddhist rules were so similar to the Ten Commandments. I'm not breaking my moral code for anyone.”

But then she fell into bad company and started breaking the Ten Commandments.

“I got hurt so bad,” she admits. “But the darkness has led me to the light. I fell hard. I broke the Christian commandments. People only knew me on the outside and said, ‘Intava, no, you're a good person.’ But on the inside, I was evil.

“You know the crude oil, the black, sticky crude oil before it becomes gasoline? I felt like I was drowning in it,” she says. “That's what it felt like to be eaten up on the inside by your own sins. I felt so dirty and horrible. I felt there was no way out of it.”

Despairing of her sinful state, Intava prayed to all the gods she knew: the Buddhist gods, the Laotian gods, the Greek gods, the Roman gods, the Egyptian gods, the Mayan gods, the Indian gods.

“I prayed to all of them. I wanted some kind of comfort from them. It was so hard,” she says. “I was just looking for a friend that understood the inside of me. I dug everywhere to find something that helped.”

Intava fell on to the floor and cried. “I needed a Saviour. It was the stuff of fairy tales, the damsel in distress needing someone to come save her,” she says. “I was like, ‘Please someone come save me. My sins are eating me alive. No medicine can save me from my sins.’”

After a long, arduous road, Intava turned to Google and typed in: How do you heal a crushed spirit and a broken heart?”

“One article said, ‘Take some aspi-



Intava sharing on YouTube.

rin,” she says. The second article said, “Repent, go to Jesus.”

Intava chose aspirin. It seemed like the easier option.

“I was hoping it would help me just a bit,” she says. “The aspirin didn't work.”

Next she tried repentance (turning away from her wrong doing). It was during Covid lockdown.

“God does not [just] hear what comes from your mouth. He hears what comes from your heart,” she says.

When she cried out to Jesus, she felt the darkness in the room.

It was midnight and very, very dark.

But as she prayed, repenting, suddenly the room brightened inexplicably. It wasn't an electric light. It was a supernatural light.

“It was like the Big Bang exploded in that room. It was like the sun exploded in that room,” she said. “My forehead was down on the ground and my eyes were closed. But I peeked a little bit. I was like, Oh no, this is the holy amazing righteous God in the room!”

“And I was the opposite. I am this evil little pipsqueak. I thought I was going to die at that moment.”

When Intava peeked, she saw the hem of Jesus' robe. “It was beautiful, the brightest, whitest light ever, glowing as if the hem of his robe had a light of its own, as if it was woven of threads of light,” she says.

So there you have it: repentance over aspirin, just as the Lord's mercy triumphs over judgment.

“He lifted me up out of that crude oil, and I could breathe for the first time in my life,” she relates. “Jesus came. I called so many gods and they didn't come. When I called Jesus, He came. All the demons fled. All the thick darkness is gone. I felt like I had so much on my shoulders, and it was gone.”

## DESERT OASIS

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters

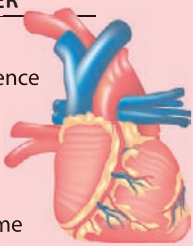


Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. — ISAIAH 55:2 NIV

# Inside my heart

## PETER'S CORNER

I HAD the most amazing experience back in 2020. I saw inside my own heart! I had experienced some irregular heartbeats, so I went for a procedure to identify the problem.



The surgeon put three catheter wires inside my heart to measure how the electrics of the heart operated. He located a minor short-circuit, and worked out that it could not cause me any real problem and was best left alone. He also "took my heart for a spin" to try to reproduce the symptoms I had, but without success.

I was awake during the procedure, watching large monitor displays, and the surgeon explained it to me. When the heart beats, an electrical signal first causes the right atrium chamber to beat. The signal then reaches the AV node, where it is delayed a short time before it travels on to cause the ventricles to beat. The timing delay is just right to ensure efficient pumping of blood. The AV node does other critical things also.

Some questions: Would a heart without an AV node work? Not at all. Would an AV node work without a heart? Again, no. Would a heart without a valve work? Would a heart without chambers and connecting arteries and veins and blood work? No — all the parts of the heart needed to be there from the beginning.

There is more: How does the AV node know what to do, to be useful for the external purpose of keeping me alive? Who told it?

There are such amazing designs and components in the heart, it is clearly mistaken to imagine the heart evolved from slime by blind random accident (which is evolution). The parts, working together, have the ability to do something that is external to what each part can do. That is how we know it is an intelligent design. The designer is God and God only, and the Bible tells us how He did it.

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 who loves stargazing and talking with others about Jesus.

# Battle to believe

BY GARY BATES

Chang-Sha Fang B.Sc. (Hons), M.Sc., is a scientist who is also a dedicated supporter of Biblical six-day creation, but it wasn't always that way.

Despite having a strong Christian heritage (his father and great-grandfather were pastors), Chang-Sha, named after a famous battle of the Sino-Japanese war, was to face his own battle, an ideological one, in years to come.

Growing up in the Fang household in a small Malaysian village called Kampong Koh, belief in God and His Word was taken for granted.

"Bible stories and verses were read all the time and the entirety of God's Word was believed," Chang-Sha recalls. "No one ever challenged the validity of the Bible and we had never concerned ourselves with the theory of evolution, as it wasn't emphasised in school science classes back then."

Chang-Sha eventually encountered the theory of evolution "full on" when at 19 years of age he left for Australia to study zoology and biology at Perth's University of Western Australia (UWA).

He remembers that when the subject of creation was raised it was always regarded as religion. But evolution was taught as fact.

"Being from an Asian background where we hold teachers in great respect, I felt too intimidated to challenge their authority," he shares.

Without the support of his family and Christian fellowship, and with the constant indoctrination of evolution being taught as fact by his lecturers, Chang-Sha graduated from university with barely any faith left.

He wondered how his family could have been wrong for all of these years.



Plant scientist Chang-Sha Fang

He understands that for some, their parents' foundation may be enough. But he says, "I had an enquiring mind, and, like a 'doubting Thomas' (John 20:24–29), I required evidence to counter my disbelief."

After Chang-Sha married, his wife Barbara became a Christian. Having no difficulties with the Creation account in Genesis, she would often show him snippets of information and creationist articles that she came across.

The turning point came during a visit by his mother from Singapore, when one night after dinner Chang-Sha told her that he was not attending church anymore. A large debate ensued.

"I told her that the Bible was a collection of stories and that Jesus was just a good teacher and philosopher," he says. "I knew my mother's heart must have been stabbed to the core."

His mother, devastated by her son's departure from faith, arranged for groups of friends and family to pray around the clock for her son's salvation.

"My research was not going well at the time and I was also frustrated due to the internal conflict I was going through," Chang-Sha remembers. "Unable to counter me with scientific arguments, my wife and mother gave me a book of sermons to read... God spoke to me through one of the sermons and said, clearly, 'I am the Creator and I can deliver you from your frustration. Just reach out to Me.' I was convicted of my need of God and my sin of denying Him. I broke down and cried like a child."

Shortly after, creationists Ken Ham and Dr Gary Parker visited Perth and Chang-Sha attended the meetings, where they spoke about the complexity in created things — design and the relevance of Creation to the Gospel of Christ.

"After listening to them, I realised that I had been totally deceived by the false science of evolution, which had caused me to become spiritually blind," Chang-Sha says. "I bought so many books and devoured them one after the other. At the same time God provided me with a good teacher in the Scriptures. Now I was so excited at all of this new information from the Bible and *Answers in Genesis*,

In Darwin's books there is no maths, no experiments, no evidence, no numbers, no statistics, no records of having tested his beliefs. His books are all extrapolation, inference, assumption and speculation.

— Richard Guther

but at the same time I also felt angry, because for so many years I had been brainwashed to believe the lie of evolution and deny my Creator and Saviour."

As a scientist trained in plant pathology, he says he can now see in his work the awe-inspiring beauty and design of the Creator, but laments that during his many years spent researching and studying, he was blind to the Maker's handprint.

Chang-Sha is aware that evolution, as commonly understood, must supposedly have been capable of generating lots of new genetic information that was nowhere in the world previously. He also knows from his own field of science that selection can only 'choose' from the genetic information that is already there in that population.

This is so, whether selection is done artificially, through selective breeding, or occurs in nature by differential survival/reproduction ('survival of the fittest'). It cannot create any new information.

Mutations (genetic copying mistakes) are supposed to do so, but so far no one has seen even one of the many information-adding mutations that should be present. Even those few which give a survival benefit turn out to be losses of information.<sup>1</sup>

The case of the domestication of the lupin plant, *Lupinus angustifolius*, is used by Chang-Sha to illustrate how selection loses information. The full domestication of this species, combining the sweetness gene with the non-shattering pod, was one of the success stories of plant breeders in Western Australia. As this species was especially adapted to sandy soils, sweet cultivars of lupin

soon became a very popular alternative grain crop for farmers.

Unfortunately, the new cultivars were found to be susceptible to anthracnose<sup>2</sup> disease. In selecting attributes for sweetness, non-shattering of pods and other yield attributes, the resistance for anthracnose disease was lost.

Similarly, blackleg<sup>3</sup> disease of oilseed rape (canola) devastated the industry in Australia in the early 1970s. To obtain the genes for resistance to this disease, which genes had been lost in the process of selecting for other attributes, plant breeders in Australia had to return to the 'original population' from which the resistance had been lost — oilseed rape stocks

in Europe.

By "back-crossing" with these European plants, genes conferring resistance to blackleg were transferred to our Australian cultivars.

"It seems obvious," says Chang-Sha, "that selection gets rid of information; it doesn't create any, and so is the opposite of what is supposed to have happened in microbe-to-man evolution. But many people think that once you have an example of something adapting by selection, you have an example of evolution. So, it almost can't be pointed out often enough."

### References and notes

1 Wieland, C., Beetle bloopers, *Creation* 19(3):30, 1997.

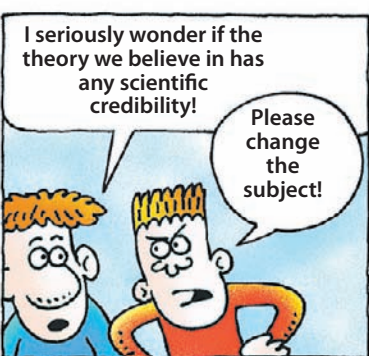
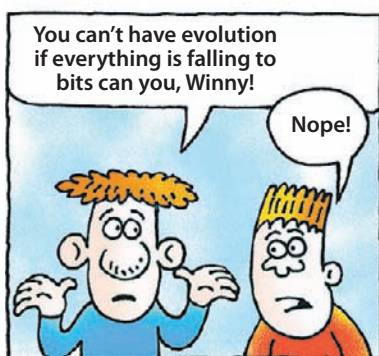
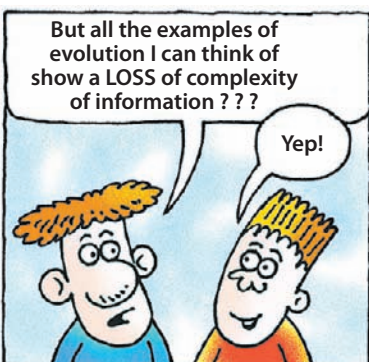
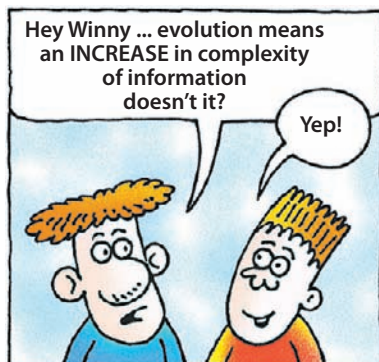
2 Anthracnose disease is caused by a fungus. Symptoms include bending of stems, lesions and death of leaves and stems above these lesions.

3 Blackleg disease is caused by a fungus that affects the roots, causing stunted growth and possible death of the plant.

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## Dar and Winny by Richard Guther

30



In Darwin's books there is no maths, no experiments, no evidence, no numbers, no statistics, no records of having tested his beliefs. His books are all extrapolation, inference, assumption and speculation.

— Richard Guther

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# Emma's second chance at life

BY NICOLE ALCINDOR

Louisiana resident Emma Benoit remembers wearing a constant smile on her face “as a façade” in her early adolescent years to cover up her deep ongoing sadness.

In an interview with *The Christian Post*, Emma recalls that while her life appeared to be picture-perfect on the outside, she felt herself slowly deteriorating mentally and emotionally.

Despite being raised in a close-knit Christian household of four, Emma says that her faith took a back seat during most of her teenage years because being a popular cheerleader was more important.

“I always felt like I could never be myself and even though I had all these friends on the outside, and it looked great, it really wasn't. It's isolating. Because I didn't feel like my friends would like me if I was myself. I protected my image and wore a mask.

“I began to really struggle with self-esteem issues and self-doubt and peer pressure at a very early age. I was about 12 and came from an environment where those things are not really talked about. It was really challenging,” Emma recalls.

She says that as a teenager, there was always the lingering cloud of depression, and she also felt anxiety, like a “crippling fear” within.

In the summer before her senior year of high school in 2017, Emma decided she could no longer pretend to be “the always-happy-person” any longer, so she attempted suicide by shooting herself in the chest with her father's gun. She was left permanently disabled.

Now 22, Emma uses a wheelchair and a walker to move around. She says that surviving the incident has brought her closer to God because she was given a second chance.

The following year, she dedicated her life to Christ and now works as a mental health advocate.

Before coming to Christ, Emma said she thought that what people thought of her was “everything”, calling it “my go-to form of validation [which] gave me a short-lived feeling of confidence”.

“I put a lot of emphasis and value into the way I looked, into how well I was performing, and that really moulded a person who was never really secure in themselves, who was never really confident,” she admits.

“My high school years were filled with this feeling of hopelessness and that ‘nothing will change. My life is going to be this hard, forever. It's so permanent.’ And those feelings only grew bigger and bigger; the longer that they went on, unaddressed and not talked about.”

Emma says that she has found peace in Jesus, and that Christianity changed her perspective on life and her viewpoint on her pursuit of



Emma Benoit was left permanently disabled after her suicide attempt.

happiness.

“Once my life was spared, I felt like there's got to be some reason why I'm here. So, I decided to just really put my effort and energy into learning more about God and learning more about the Bible and learning more about Christ,” she said.

“I'm so grateful for this journey. I look at things so much differently now. I just see things in a different light.

“And I mean, it truly all boils down to the fact that we are imperfect human beings, and it's not our job to fix ourselves. We can't rely solely on ourselves in this life.”

Emma says that her Christian faith has been instrumental in helping her walk through her recovery process.

“My faith has been super crucial for me in my recovery because I've been able to totally give everything to God and just rely on Him completely and utterly to get me through hard things.

“**My faith has been super crucial in my recovery.**”

“And I've really realized that while I might not be able to pray away my depression, I certainly can utilize the tools that I believe God has given us in this life to navigate life in a different way.”

Additionally, Emma now sees a therapist whom she says helps her navigate life along-

side Jesus.

“I believe that therapists, counselors, teachers, knowledge, education and medication are skills and gifts that we have been given to help one another through life.

“And honestly, I think my overall perspective on life is much different because I know that there's hope. And I know that this isn't our permanent home [because Jesus promises us an eternal home in heaven after we die].”

This article first appeared in *The Christian Post*



STOCK PHOTO

## The remedy to bullying

BY TAYLOR PERKINS

I STARTED public school in seventh grade after being home-schooled for the majority of my life. I had a vision of what public school would look like for me. It involved me making as many friends as I wanted, spending my weekends at the movies and walking down the hallways earning the admiring glances from all my peers. It only took a little while for this vision, along with my self-esteem, to be shipwrecked and for my identity to become lost at sea. To my great pain, I found that I was not admired, but hated. Not envied, but mocked.

Bullying is a constant reality, a dark companion, telling you to not even bother trying to talk to that guy. It's the whisper that warns you to stop passing by mirrors, because there's nothing good to see there. It's the darkness that urges you to take the pain into your own hands to hurt yourself because you deserve it. I held these thoughts in my heart for years.

I dropped out of public school and started hiding from the world. But I learned that you can't outrun your demons. The roots of unforgiveness and resentment were firmly embedded into my spirit. In fact, I think the best word to describe my entire being at that time was hate. I was so consumed with insecurity and bitterness from the past that I was completely missing out on the life right in front of me. In fact, the darkness surrounding me was so strong that it seemed as if I would never find the light again. Never feel confident again.

But there is One who is stronger and His eyes never stopped watching over me through it all.

One day, during my senior year of high school, I heard an inspirational speaker on the TV as I sat in my living room. He talked about the importance of forgiving your enemies and letting go of hatred. That caught my attention. What a weird thing to say!

That's completely ridiculous, I thought. But as any child of the modern technological era would do, I followed my obsessive need to Google everything. I discovered that in the Bible one of Jesus' followers asked Him how many times we are expected to forgive our enemies. He wondered if seven times would be enough. Jesus told him to forgive people “70 times seven” meaning infinitely. I didn't really like the idea of that, so I dismissed it and went on my way. The next day I was riding in the car and when I looked up for a second, I saw the number “7x70” flash on our radio screen showing which songs are playing.

I went home that night and obeyed God for the first time in years. That night I made a choice to consciously forgive everyone who I held grudges against in my heart. At first, it was just a robotic, going-down-the-list chore. But then God started moving powerfully and actively in my heart, and by the end of the list I was a new person. I felt the unbearably heavy chains being lifted off of my spirit, replaced with a weightlessness that brought me to my knees. In that moment, God did for me what I could never do for myself. That night, God set me free.

He can do the same for you. At the bottom of the pit is where He finds you. Standing alone in the middle of the crowd is where He sees you. In the bathroom with the blade in your hands is where He holds you. In the deepest aches of your heart is where He heals you. And in the restless part of your soul, where so many lies have shut out the light, is where He whispers the truth about who you are.

On that day when God found me and spoke to me, I realized that Jesus was the cure my soul had been searching for all that time. By His gentle urging and help, I was able to forgive my bullies.

No longer am I anxious about what others think about me, because I know how the God of the universe feels about me. No longer am I bitter about what has been done to me, because I have a strong defender who fights my battles for me. And no longer am I a slave to hate, both of myself and others, because I have been pursued by a love that changes everything.

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**If you can't see the sun you will be impressed with a street light. If you've never known thunder and lightning you'll be impressed with fireworks. And if you turn your back on the greatness and majesty of God you'll fall in love with a world of shadows and short-lived pleasures.**

**- John Piper**

# Youth Truth

## Set free from porn and depression

BY DANTE LEE GRADY

I grew up in a deeply religious, broken home. When we misbehaved, we were forced to sit and read Scripture. Because of this, I knew the stories, but I was never taught the love of God — and I surely never saw it within our home. My parents fought constantly, often until the cops showed up.

Things escalated when my dad found out about my mom's affair. Threats were made and, in eighth grade, my parents split up. I was still grieving the split when my mom began dating a new man. Hurt and angry, I rebelled. I started partying



Dante with Pastor James Lee Grady, who is now his mentor.

and taking drugs and there even came a point where I couldn't go a day without smoking weed. In 10th grade, my sister and I both developed depression and anxiety. She developed it first.

I remember being unable to understand what was happening to her, until a few weeks later, when it hit me like a ton of bricks. It felt like my life was crumbling in on me... I felt that I was living within a box.

I cut off all of my friends and dropped out of school. My long-standing porn addiction worsened. I was stuck — immobilised by a purposelessness.

Just as I was preparing to end my life, my dad invited me to church. He really wanted me to hear the visiting pastor, a man named James Lee Grady (though no relation of mine).

Up until that point, I'd only visited church to hang out with my friends or talk to girls. But, my dad kept hyping the pastor up, so I gave in.

During his sermon, the pastor spoke against pornography.

He mentioned porn again later in the service and also touched upon every single other issue in my life.



Dante Lee Grady.

I immediately knew that God was speaking directly to me.

It was like He dropped down a screen and presented me with my entire life story.

Without warning, I found myself moving towards the altar. I felt that the hand of God grabbed me by the heart and pulled me up there. There was nothing that I could possibly

have done to stay in that seat! When I got to the altar, Pastor Grady spoke to me. I felt love for the very first time. The heavy blanket of darkness was gone; in its place was none other than the Holy Spirit. I'd been saved and it was obvious to me and everyone around me. People said they'd never seen me smile like that!

I went home and tossed out all of my drug paraphernalia. I threw away all of my secular music. During this time, God even freed me from my seven-year porn addiction. I was on fire!

But, like many new believers, I thought that the fire would remain aflame on its own. As 2 Timothy 1:6 reads, *"For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you by the laying on of my hands."* I didn't know that I needed to fan the flame, so it gradually went out.

Fortunately, God has since shown

me the key to keeping my fire lit: spending my idle time in Scripture, worship, and prayer.

I now see that the world — in other words, society apart from God — is always, always feeding us. There's never a time when the surrounding culture isn't feeding us.

But a heavenly, God-prepared feast is also readily available. So, we have a choice.

If you choose to eat junk, you can't be surprised when that junk comes out in your thoughts and actions. Neglecting prayer and worship leads to spiritual starvation; and it's like an iPhone charger

— if you're at 1%, you're basically dead.

If you feel your fire weakening, reach for God. He's right there waiting. Even if you've neglected Him, He is never far from you. The distractions of this world add static to our connection with Him, but if you're in Christ, you cannot be separated from Him. God never hangs up on us.

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

## NO JOY IN NEW AGE

BY RACHEL FATYANOV

I struggled with a lot of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and moodiness during and immediately after my college years.

When I felt I had reached my threshold of emotional suffering, I dove into countless self-help articles on happiness, Buddhism/Zen, yoga, and I dabbled in New Age and occult practices — reading books, daily horoscopes, visiting psychics, palm-readers, exploring meditation, and crystal/energy healing.

I just wanted to know, like many do, "What do I do with my life?"

All the while I believed God existed, but replacing the name of God with "Universe" felt so much easier.

The last straw was when I paid nearly \$200 for an online chakra healing program that PROMISED happiness, forever. I was alone in my room on the computer, desperately awaiting the live introductory seminar. A 10-second countdown began, and suddenly, so clearly in my heart I heard, "You don't need this, turn off the computer." And I closed the laptop within the last few seconds.

"So now what?" I asked myself. Over the next couple of days came a lot of revelation — I was not going to find the happiness and healing I needed in any man-made program. Such things come from God, and they are free and everlasting!

I came across everystudent.com through a Google search on Jesus. His name was not new to me, but I was ready to know who He was/is, and what makes Him the cornerstone of the Christian faith. For the first time, I understood what Jesus

was offering me and felt invited to be in a relationship with Him. I was really excited, knowing my desperate search for healing and happiness was over, and that I could be covered in His love.

I prayed a prayer of salvation on my knees in my room. After finally surrendering and letting God in, He has been at work in every area of my life ever since. In retrospect, my interest and involvement in New Age and occult practices were driven by a hunger for hidden knowledge, wisdom, immediate answers to all my wonderings, and life guidance. Like many others, I just wanted a sense of control and purpose for my life.

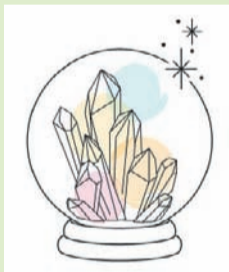
Ever since coming to know God through Jesus Christ, I realized that He has already revealed to us everything we need to know, and it's in His Word — the Bible.

I want to warn people to not be deceived by anyone who claims to have the power to reveal the unknown to you about your future. I fell into the trap of worshipping the "Universe," until I came to know the Creator of the Universe — the One who spoke the stars, the sun, and the moon into existence.

For anyone struggling to answer the same question I was, "What do I do with my life?", the answer is simple. There is nothing to do but to seek after and follow Jesus. Everything else falls into place.

I cannot imagine my life without God — He is my Heavenly Father who meets my needs, a Comforter who hears my every cry, an Advocate who fights my battles, a wise Friend who guides my every step, and so much more.

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## What to do with loneliness

BY ASHLEYNE SEITZ

I'VE felt lonely while sitting in my car at a stoplight, radio blasting and windows rolled down. I've felt it in a crowded room, surrounded by laughter and friends. I've felt it in the middle of the night, both in my dreams and when I wake up suddenly in the dark. Loneliness.

It's a familiar feeling for all of us. Ever wonder what we were made for? The Bible explains that God wired us for connection, for community. Often we idealise romantic relationships and even friendships, thinking that if we only found the right person, we'd never be lonely again. But loneliness can be found even in happily married men and women. Not only were we wired for connection with other humans, we were wired for connection with God. Even wealth, achievement, and honour are not enough to keep us from loneliness. There are stories in the Bible that talk both about people who had it all and still felt lonely and other people who had nothing but found what they needed by approaching God.

Solomon was a king of Israel to whom God granted immense wisdom. And he literally had it all: huge piles of gold, a giant palace, and hundreds of wives and concubines. You'd think Solomon would have been the most content man on earth! But he wrote a book about how pointless life is: *"Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun"* (Ecclesiastes 2:11). You can hear his loneliness and desperation in that statement!

In comparison, one day when Jesus was walking through a town, He was met by a man with leprosy. Lepers were outcasts and rejects, often abandoned by friends and family to beg on street corners just to have something to eat. Jesus touched the leper — a person who had likely not been touched by another human being in years — and healed him. His life suddenly had joy and meaning, despite the fact that he still had nothing and no one. We were made to have a relationship with God. It's the one thing that can bring us out of our loneliness, because it's the connection we were made to have. That one interaction with Jesus, who is God, brought meaning, comfort and joy to the life of that leper, while all the jewels, gold, and women in the world didn't bring meaning to Solomon's life.

Having a personal relationship with God changes everything; it is the answer to our loneliness problem. That said, does having a relationship with God protect us from feelings of loneliness for the rest of our lives? No.

Simply put, the system is broken. We are separated from God by our sin, our desire to live apart from God. In this world, we cannot experience life the way it was meant to be, without ever feeling loneliness or evil or sorrow or fear. So now what? Despite the fact loneliness is a reality of being human with no immediate cure, there are two things that can help in the here and now:

### Community: how to deal with loneliness

Because we were created for connection, a big part of dealing with loneliness is to be in community. No friend will save you from being lonely ever again, but when you

have people around you who care about you for who you are (not for your body, skills, money, or ability to hold alcohol) it can help you see you are not really alone.

### Someone who understands your loneliness

When Jesus was going through the worst hours of his life and about to be crucified, his friends abandoned Him and even pretended they didn't know Him. Jesus knows what it is like to be a lonely human. The Bible says in Psalm 34:18, *"The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* What would it feel like to know in your deepest moment of loneliness, you are not alone?

Sin is what keeps us from God. No matter how good you are or how hard you try, you cannot overcome that separation. God sent Jesus to earth in order to restore our relationship with Him. Jesus, the perfect Son of God, died for your sins so that you can be clean like the leper; no longer an outcast or a reject but a child of God. God wants you to come to Him.

Would you like to start a relationship with God and let Him help you in your moments of loneliness? You can do that right now by believing Him and accepting Him into your life through prayer, which is simply talking to God. Pray something like this: *Lord Jesus, I want to know you personally. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life to you and ask you to come in as my Savior and Lord. Take control of my life. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Thank you for being with me and for promising that You will never leave me. Please help me to feel Your presence.*

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STOCK PHOTO

# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## Mending fences and dismantling walls

BY ROB FURLONG

IN his famous poem, "Mending Wall", Robert Frost begins with the line:

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall."

The poem goes on to recount how he and his neighbor meet at the fence line dividing their rural properties each spring to repair the damage done to the "wall" during winter.

While his neighbor insists, "Good fences make good neighbors", Frost doesn't agree and throughout the poem, he pushes against the idea, even suggesting at one point he would like to ask his neighbor:

*"Why do they make good neighbors? Before I built a wall I'd ask to know What I was walling in or walling out, And to whom I was like to give*

offence."

Frost's question challenges us to think about the walls we erect between each other and why they are there!

We "wall" each other out over race, religion, gender, and social status, resulting in division and the inability to hear each other.

Is it possible to break down the walls that exist between us? I think so!

One day, Jesus had a conversation with a woman, which by the custom of His day was unthinkable — He spoke to a Samaritan woman as she drew water from the local well, in the middle of the day.

The conversation is unthinkable because firstly, she is a woman; it was culturally inappropriate.

Secondly, she was a Samaritan, which meant there was a religious and racial wall between her and Jesus.

Finally, because of her lifestyle, she was a social outcast in her community, which is why she was drawing water in the middle of the day, when other women would not be around.

Jesus broke down the walls of race, religion, gender, and social status in one conversation!

Of particular interest, it is Jesus Who initiates the conversation, and as simple as this sounds, it is the key to how we can go about dismantling the walls we have erected with others.

The conversation between Jesus and the woman

— which led to her spiritual awakening — would never have happened if Jesus had not begun by

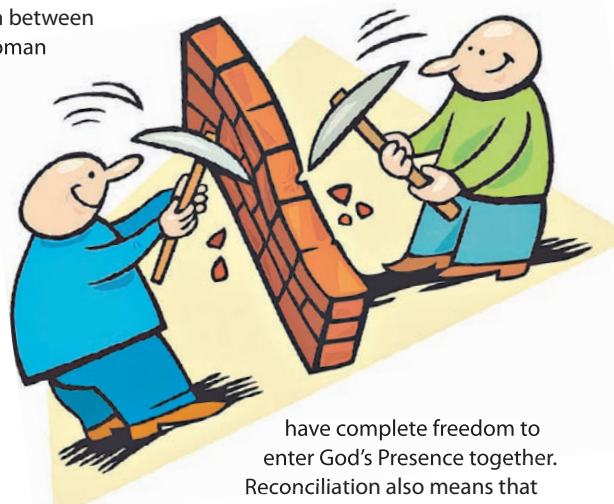
acknowledging her presence and speaking to her.

It's the same with us. We all have relationships where a "wall" exists, but if that wall is to ever come down, then someone must make the first move, and that someone may have to be you.

All you need do is find the courage to talk to the other person. There is no doubt in my mind that one of the saddest experiences in ministry is when I speak with two people — you can almost feel and touch the wall between them — and neither one is willing to take the first step to dismantle it.

Jesus tore down the wall of separation between us, God, and people by becoming "our peace" and reconciling us to God through His death and resurrection.

Reconcile means to change from one condition to another. Before Jesus, Jews and non-Jews were enemies — now we are united and



have complete freedom to enter God's Presence together. Reconciliation also means that all hostility between us has been removed and no barrier to unity has been left.

Because Jesus accepts all of us, we can also accept each other!

It's a very simple message. Making peace with God means our relationship with Him has changed. We have gone from being His enemy to being His friend.

But being at peace with God also changes our relationships with people. We now love those we once despised, care for those we once ignored and accept those we once rejected.

Jesus didn't like walls — between people and God or people and people — so He tore them down and brought about reconciliation.

Is there someone you find difficult to love or accept? Reflect and pray again on the above and ask God to show you how to love them.

# Lessons from a sick bed

BY JODY BENNETT

I HAVE recently been suffering with prolonged ill health, during which I spent several weeks mostly in bed and feeling rotten.

Illness naturally makes one morbid and introspective, but I don't like self-pity, and as a Christian I believe that everything happens for a reason, so I sought to use the time not to ask the tempting question "Why, Lord?" but instead "What are you trying to teach me, Lord?"

Here are the first three of 10 insights I had:

1. Patients are aptly named! It takes a lot of patience to be sick for an extended period. And patience is a virtue that is hard to develop and takes — by definition — a long time to learn!



When ill one has to have patience to wait for appointments, and results, and a correct diagnosis, and the pain to abate, and the medications to take effect. Waiting for an explanation, while worrying about one's symptoms, is particularly hard in a day and age where we expect to be able to get answers to just about any question with a quick Google search. The Bible uses a very descriptive word as a synonym for patient — "longsuffering".

The book of Psalms has a lot to say about waiting patiently on and for God. I have found that He often replies "wait" in answer to my prayers, and it is always a difficult answer to accept. I have to learn to be longsuffering.

2. While one is waiting for the answers to bigger prayers, like "Please heal me!" it is good to acknowledge the answers to many other prayers that might have been prayed along the way.

For instance, for me nausea was a real problem for a while, and nausea tablets are no longer sold over the counter (in Australia). Then I happened to watch a YouTube nursing skit where they talked about how sniffing alcohol wipes helps combat nausea. Who knew!?

After that I got great relief from sniffing rubbing alcohol, until I could get a script for tablets. Small mercies...

3. As I have put aside my impatience and embraced the journey, it has been really nice to have a proper rest.

Life is so busy! There are so many small chores that I usually attend to from the moment I get up, and then there is work and exercise and commitments. It was really lovely to break the routine, to do nothing but lie on the couch listening to a book or watching TV or sleeping, and not feeling guilty because I was too sick to care!

If we can put aside our impatience and alter our expectations, rest can be a great blessing and a precious time.

To be continued...

For the full article online see [www.challenge.news/jody](http://www.challenge.news/jody)



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SUBGROUP	Y	9	7	6	2	3	4	5	8	1
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## 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

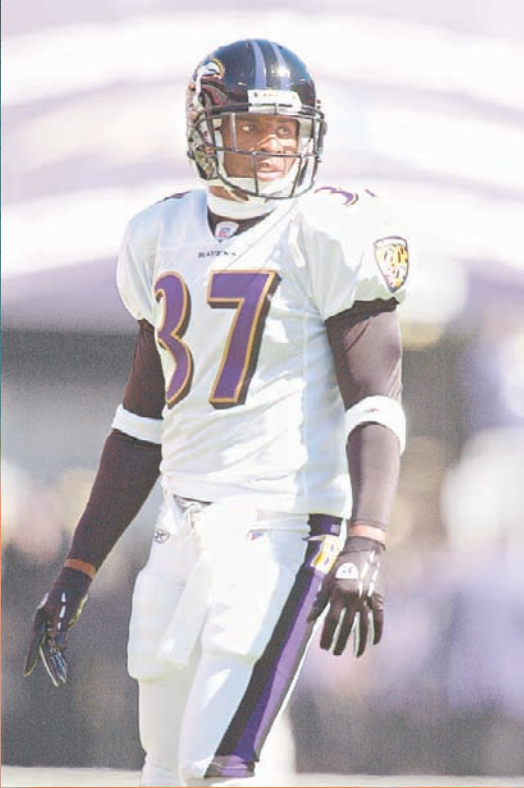
*It is my conviction that we have done ourselves a disservice in our prayers by asking for God to take away suffering from our lives. True enough, the desire is understandable. ... If we take omnipotence and omniscience seriously, what can we realistically make of the prayer, "Lord, from my shoulders, this burden lift"? Is He all-powerful? Then He certainly can do so. Is He all-knowing? Then He certainly will know when to do so. Does the Father truly love us? Then He has, at minimum, permitted this for our good. It seems to me that our prayers, then, should not be aimed at the release from our sufferings, but at a serious and fervent call for the strengthening of our bodies and souls through suffering. When the time is right, rest assured He will permit it to pass; we don't need to remind Him. — Matthew Beal*

## Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, online Christian resources:

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





Deion Sanders of the Cincinnati Reds attempts to steal second base during a Major League Baseball game against the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1997 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. (Photo by George Gojkovich/Getty Images)

INSET: Deion Sanders #37 of the Baltimore Ravens during a NFL football game against the Pittsburgh Steelers on September 19, 2004 in Baltimore, Maryland. (Photo by Mitchell Layton/Getty Images)



# THE PAIN OF SUCCESS

In 1997 Deion Sanders was at the top of his game in not just one but two sports. Nicknamed “Prime Time” and “Neon Deion”, he was playing in both the National Football League (NFL) and Major League Baseball (MLB) and made history by hitting an MLB home run and scoring an NFL touchdown in the same week. He had achieved success other athletes only dream of, winning two Super Bowl titles and making a World Series. Yet Deion was empty. So empty that he

attempted suicide - something he credits with actually saving his life.

Starting off his career playing baseball, Deion was drafted in 1985 by the Kansas City Royals but didn't sign with the team, waiting until 1988, when he was drafted by the New York Yankees.

He debuted the following year, the same year he was drafted by the Atlanta Falcons in the NFL draft.

He went on to spend 14 successful seasons in the football league with five different teams. He was named All-Pro nine times, a Pro Bowl player eight times as well as Defensive Player of the Year in 1994 with the San Francisco 49ers.

Deion played parts of nine baseball seasons with four different teams. He is the only player to ever take part in a football Super Bowl and a baseball World Series.

In an interview with Bear Grylls, Deion shares how he felt after winning his first Super Bowl.

*Deion Sanders speaks onstage during The Big Homecoming Event at Clark Atlanta University on June 17, 2022 in Atlanta, Georgia. (Photo by Paras Griffin/Getty Images)*

“I was the first one on the bus, the first one to bed. I didn't even go and party. [There] was something missing inside. It wasn't as fulfilling as I thought it was. It wasn't about the things - the outward things - because I had power, money and sex but it wasn't fulfilling ... there was an empty feeling still.”

When Deion went through a divorce and lost custody of his children, the emptiness only grew.

“It was devastating. I went through a suicidal period.”

He attempted to end his life by driving his car off a 40-foot cliff. To his surprise, he walked away with no significant injuries.

“Shortly after that I had to just come to the Lord with my hands up and say, ‘I'm done. I can't do it anymore. You've got me. I give up. God, You take me.’”

“I had to get a lot of Word in [read the Bible a lot] so that I could fight off the enemy,” Deion says in a Sports casting article. “I wouldn't be where I am today without my faith ... My faith is everything. It's the gas that propels the courage; the truth that keeps me going.”

Deion went on to win custody of his children.

“I pride myself on being the best dad in the world,” he told Bear Grylls in 2014. “I know all their shoe sizes, all their clothes sizes, the teachers. I know how to braid my daughter's hair. It has to be something bigger than you that you're working for,

that you're living for. If it's all about you, you've already lost.”

Deion spoke about Christianity in a video for Alright TV on YouTube.

“The fact that you are here is proof that God does exist,” he explains.

“Do you really think that you're the design of two random molecules

just coming together randomly? God is a God of order. And we all must go through the same process. When God created Adam and Eve it was a meticulous process.”

Since his playing days, Deion became an analyst for CBS

Sports, NFL Network, and Barstool Sports. He was an assistant coach for women's professional basketball team Dallas Fury as well as the offensive coordinator for the football team for the school his sons

attended until 2020, when he was hired by Jackson State.

Last year Deion's doctors discovered severe blood clots in his leg, which required two of his toes to be amputated from his left foot.

“We may smell like smoke because we've been through the fire,” Deion says in an interview with Chris Neely of Thee Pregame Show.

“But I wouldn't change none of it. I needed it. I love it, I'm proud of it, I'm thankful for it. I got to really see God's face.”

Deion feels fortunate that he only lost two toes and not his entire leg or even his life.

“So when I look up and say thank you, Jesus, it's because I know the quiet cries at night that were in that hospital.”

Now 55, Deion is the head football coach at Jackson State. He has written a book about his life called *Power, Money & Sex: How Success Almost Ruined My Life*. •



“ I had power, money and sex but it wasn't fulfilling. ”

