

# I FOUND A NEW LIFE

## The day death died

BY ANDREW HALLOWAY

**DID** you know that your greatest enemy has been defeated?

Death has been conquered – and it all happened back on the first Easter Sunday.

We've all had some gloomy reminders recently that death is a reality, whether through the Covid pandemic or the wars and other tragic events around the world.

But death no longer has the victory over us, it is NOT the end!

That's why Easter should be a party, not a funeral!

Invite everyone, get the music on, and get dancing on the grave of death – because we no longer have to fear it.

I say again, it is NOT the end.

Yes, Jesus died, but after a couple of days to show he was truly dead, he came back to life on the third day!

And with Him he brought the invitations for all of us to a party in heaven that will never end.

When He rose from the dead, Jesus guaranteed that we too can defeat death. How, you ask? No one comes back to tell us.

But one Person has – Jesus.

That's what

turned the world upside down 2,000 years ago as Christianity

exploded onto the scene, as ordinary people encountered a living Jesus who could transform their lives.

Yes, we die physically, but – if we put our lives in Jesus' nail-scarred hands – we can live through death and enjoy a whole new life, forever.

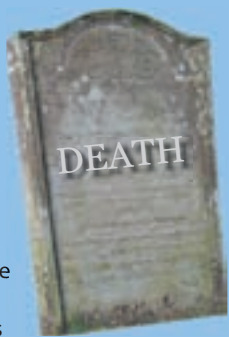
That's why Jesus came. Not just to teach us how to live right, important though that is, but to give us eternal life.

That's why we can call Good Friday "Good". It was the awful day that Jesus was tortured and executed, but it was also the day death died.

Jesus' death opens up new life to all who will believe, and His resurrection was the proof!

As Jesus said: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish" (John 10:28).

Have you joined the party yet?



BY LEXI AGGEN (ABRIDGED)

In the early '90s, Rochelle's life looked like the American dream. She was married to a man who served as a deacon at their church and her three children performed well in school. But life inside the home was more like a nightmare. Rochelle's husband was abusive. She hid it from her children but couldn't convince everyone. Her boss knew something was wrong and one day pulled Rochelle aside to say a prayer for her.

Her boss wasn't aware that, at her husband's request, Rochelle had set up dummy accounts to look like businesses and was paying them with money from the company. Rochelle wanted a different life – she wanted out of her loveless marriage and out of hiding, but she didn't know how.

She cried out to God, begging Him to get her out of this situation. She never anticipated how the Lord would answer her prayer. That same day, Rochelle was arrested and charged for theft of \$50,000. She was sentenced to 14 years in prison in a facility eight hours away from her family.

While in prison, Rochelle was given a Bible from a Prison Fellowship volunteer named Emma who led a Bible study at her facility. When she received the Bible, Rochelle dismissed it. What could she get from the Bible?

One day, while at a prayer service in the prison, Rochelle had an encounter with the Lord that changed her heart toward the Bible she had been given. The speaker mentioned God reviving "dry bones" in Ezekiel 37, and Rochelle began to wonder if her own dry bones could live.



Rochelle living her new life with her husband, Anthony.

She opened the Bible Emma had given her and expected to read that she was special and loved. While that was true, Rochelle also learned more truths about herself: "I was deceptive," she says, "I was manipulative. I had learned maladaptive behavior. I had childhood trauma."

Rochelle had grown up in the 1970s, the daughter of a woman who struggled with mental illness. At 13

Rochelle was pregnant and living with her grandmother.

But her grandmother saw a bright future for Rochelle and encouraged her to graduate high school. At 16, Rochelle had her second child – and never gave up on her studies. She graduated high school, and at the age of 18 joined the military with her uncle, who was the same age and had been raised as a brother to her.

Rochelle served in operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm immediately after training. While she was proud to be in the military, what really appealed to her was the way it made her look. Her service to the nation masked her guilt and shame to the outside world, while inside she was struggling.

"It was an honor to serve my country," she says, "but I thought it would also be that place to replace what I thought was missing, to affirm that validation from the things I've experienced as a child."

While serving, she met and married her first husband. She fought hard to make her life look different than she felt internally. She attributes her incarceration to overcompensating for what she felt she didn't have.

When Rochelle realized she had learned unhealthy ways of living she set out to make a change. She approached the prison chaplain and asked to borrow a dictionary. Instead of looking up the negative words she felt God revealed to her, she looked up the opposite.

The first word: integrity. At the top of a page in her new Bible, she wrote down "integrity," followed by its definition. She wanted to see it in her own life, so for the next 10 months she prayed, searched the scriptures, and asked the Holy Spirit to help integrity take root in her life.

After the 10 months were over, Rochelle could see a difference in how she behaved – and so could the correctional officers. She then moved onto the next word: accountability. Rochelle continued this process of writing down words and practicing them until a change had taken place in her heart.

The changes were visible not just to the corrections officers, but all who encountered Rochelle. She developed a relationship with Emma and took part in the Bible study she hosted. On the prison yard, women would approach Rochelle for counsel.

● Turn to page 2

## DON'T SETTLE FOR ALMOST

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

**THE** young driver hit a tree. His car was a write off. Adding to the dilemma, it was his mother's car.

I couldn't believe his words. He said, "I almost made it around that bend."

Swimming champion, Kyle Chalmers, almost made it at the Tokyo Olympics. He ran second place to Caeleb Dressel in the 100 meter freestyles – finishing just 0.06seconds behind the American winner.

But *almost* making it doesn't make it! If you miss by a millimeter you miss by a mile. To miss by a millisecond is to miss by a minute. Those who *almost* make it don't!

Explorers, Burke and Wills, fatefully succumbed to *almost* in the tragedy at Coopers Creek.

Sir Douglas Mawson agonized over it when he made it back alone from the South Pole and then saw the sails of a ship moving away – leaving him another year in the



"Almost" isn't quite the same as a hole in one! Stock photo.

freezing Antarctica.

**Almost got him**

An assassins attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler *almost* succeeded. He carefully studied Hitler's routine and set up a bomb in a wooden pillar near to where the dictator made regular speeches.

Hitler's address, however, was shorter than usual and he left before the bomb went off.

The would be assassin *almost* made it to freedom but was intercepted by a curious border guard. How different the world would be if the assassin succeeded!

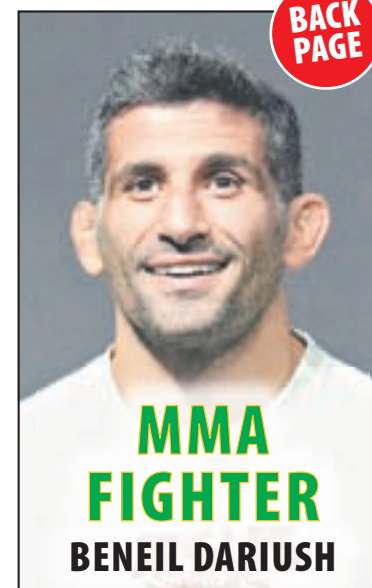
**Almost certain**

I was intrigued by the word "almost" in the chapter headings of *The God Delusion* – a book written by atheist Richard Dawkins. The heading in chapter four said, *Why there almost certainly is no God.*

What an admission!

● Turn to page 3

BACK PAGE



MMA FIGHTER BENEIL DARIUSH

# I WAS A NEO-NAZI

BY KEN PARKER

I joined the Ku Klux Klan in 2011, at age 31. I'd just left the Navy and was spending most of my time sitting at home with my wife. One evening, we found ourselves binge-watching the documentary series *Gangland*. While watching an episode on the Klan, my wife off-handedly suggested that I join.



Ken in Loyal White Knight garb (photo by Dennis Ho) and at his baptism with Pastor Will.

"It's right up your alley," she said — and she was right. I was missing the camaraderie of the military, so I found the Klan's brand of brotherhood very, very appealing. On top of that, I wasn't at all fazed by the organization's ideology. Though I grew up in an integrated environment and attended diverse schools, I had some pretty racist inclinations. And I was fine with that. I considered myself a Christian, but my theology more than allowed for white supremacy. So, I did some research and sent out a few applications.

The Loyal White Knights were the first group to call me. They asked if I'd help recruit for an upcoming rally and, without hesitation, I said yes.

I was quickly indoctrinated. The organization twisted Scripture until the "faith" not only allowed for white supremacy, but demanded a defence of it. I was deceived and I also deceived others; as a recruiter, I lied regularly. In media interviews, I'd boast that we had 1500 regional members, when we only had four or so. It felt strange at first, but I got the hang of it and, for that, I was rewarded. Within three months, I'd been named Grand Dragon of Florida and Georgia. I was third in command.

As a leader, I became disillusioned — not by the Klan's mission, but by the members' rampant drug use. Almost everyone was on meth. So, in 2016, I left the Klan for the Nazis, or the National Socialist Movement. Again, I quickly moved up the ranks, eventually gaining control of Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas. I helped organize the infamous 2017 Charlottesville rally, which really put me on the map. I was known.

Things started to shift a few months after Charlottesville.

It began with an interview for the Netflix special *White Right: Meeting the Enemy*.

I was shocked to find that I liked

the filmmaker, Deeyah Khan. I remember thinking "She's a Muslim...how can she be so smart and cool?" I was genuinely confused.

Around the same time, a black pastor named Will struck up a conversation with me at our apartment's pool. It was obvious that he knew who I was, but he showed me nothing but kindness.

I told him that I'd asked many pastors for theological arguments against white supremacy, but none could answer my questions. Pastor Will simply replied that God had come to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to extend love and salvation to His creation.

I scoffed at the time, but his words stuck with me.

In the following weeks, I began questioning my Christian identity. I'd considered myself a Christian my whole life, but it was becoming clear that I was far from one. I was a "Christian" because I'd grown up in the church and believed in God ... but, that was it. I wasn't following Christ. I was following Nazism.

I was also realizing that white supremacists' "biblical" justifications for racial hierarchy and hatred were missing from Scripture.

The more I read the Bible, the more I began to see that white supremacy was a religion of its own; it was separate from and contradictory to the Word of God. As a major rally in Tennessee approached, I found myself at a crossroads. In confusion, I turned to Pastor Will. His response was simple: pray.

The night before the rally, I sat alone at my desk and prayed. Out of nowhere, I was slapped across the face by Someone unseen. This wasn't imagined; the slap left a mark on my face — I almost bruised! I then heard

the voice of the Lord say, "You are not going."

In that moment, I was set free. I'd already internally acknowledged that white supremacy was a lie, but I'd still been bound to it; finally, that night, I found the freedom that Christ died to give me. In my resignation letter, I stated that I was leaving hate to follow Christ. Some members were supportive, but many called me a "race traitor". A few even threatened my life.

Soon after, Pastor Will invited me to his church. Of course, I was insanely nervous. I was sure that the members would judge me for my past, but when I arrived, everyone greeted me, hugged me, and shook my hand. It was awesome! On June 21st, 2018, Pastor Will baptized me off the coast of Jacksonville, Florida. I'm now the only white member of an all-black church — and I feel right at home.

The same God who opened the eyes of the Apostle Paul opened mine. When Paul met Jesus, he was on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus. I met Him on my way to persecute His people in Tennessee. The Holy Spirit knocked Paul down and blinded him; I was slapped. Two hateful people living thousands of years apart, same intelligent, redeeming God. That is a testament to our God's steadfastness.

There's no way for me to make amends with every single person I've harmed. This pains me. I can't make it right, but I can speak against white supremacy and share my story of divine redemption. I can share the truth of the Cross. It's not always easy to share, but since the moment Jesus saved me, my life has no longer belonged to me. I — and my story — exist for nothing other than His glory.

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



Rochelle still uses the weathered old Bible she received while in prison.

## I found a new life

• From page 1

Back home, things had changed as well. Her marriage dissolved, and her children were living with her father and stepmother.

Rochelle learned how to build her life on a solid foundation while in prison. When she was released on parole, she had the opportunity to bring the lessons she had learned behind the walls back into her family life and community.

After her release Rochelle met her current husband, Anthony, while living in Tennessee. The pair has a blended family, and Rochelle and Anthony co-labor in prison ministry.

One of her favorite parts of the job is helping prisoners receive Bibles, like the one she received all those years ago—and helping them discover what it looks like to walk with integrity and accountability. To this day, she still uses the tattered, weathered old Bible she received while in prison, notes and all.

The original of this story can be found at [www.prisonfellowship.org](http://www.prisonfellowship.org) and it is used with kind permission.

## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

### ACROSS

- 1 Fly-fisher's target
- 3 Careless hurrying
- 6 Wrinkly faced dog
- 8 Woolly critters
- 9 Vegetable bulb
- 10 Wharf, pier
- 13 Chess piece or bird
- 14 Military trainee
- 17 Past middle age
- 18 Pool-testing digit!
- 19 Walk like you own the place
- 20 Darkest hours

### DOWN

- 1 Oopsy on the keys
- 2 Receptacle for infusions
- 3 Cape of Good
- 4 Fleshy plant



- 5 School writings
- 7 Early explosive
- 11 Athens residents
- 12 Gorge, ravine
- 15 Horse's slow run
- 16 Thaw, dissolve

### SOLUTIONS PAGE 7



"I know my instruments are sterilised every day, but I have no idea who does it!"

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|   |   | 2 | 7 |   |   | 9 |   |
|   |   | 9 | 1 | 2 |   | 4 |   |
|   |   |   |   |   | 6 |   | 5 |
|   |   | 8 | 2 |   |   | 9 |   |
|   |   | 1 |   |   |   | 7 |   |
|   |   | 6 |   |   | 7 | 4 |   |
| 1 |   |   | 6 |   |   |   |   |
|   | 4 |   |   | 1 | 9 | 6 |   |
|   | 6 |   |   |   | 5 | 8 |   |

## nudge WITH KARL FAASE

### What we need to be happy

IN HIS book with the clever title *Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart*, Gordon Livingstone reflects on happiness. He says that in his years as a professional therapist, many clients have wanted him to make them happy. Livingstone tells them:

"The good news is that we have effective treatments for the symptoms of depression. The bad news is that medication will not make you happy. Happiness is not simply the absence of despair."

He says that all of us need three qualities in life to be happy.

Firstly, someone to love, secondly something to do and thirdly something to look forward to. If we have these three traits we are well

on the way to happiness.

Here is why Christian belief can make such a difference: God loves us and gives us the opportunity to love.

We are gifted by God with the opportunity to serve others, and to make a positive contribution to our world. And thirdly, Christians have eternal security promised in Jesus.

God doesn't promise an easy life but God does give us what we need for a joyful life.



"God undertook the most dramatic rescue operation in cosmic history. He determined to save the human race from self-destruction, and He sent His Son Jesus Christ to salvage and redeem them. The work of man's redemption was accomplished at the cross."  
Billy Graham

# PRISON SET ME FREE

Chris Roby knew he was dying. He knew every time he took a drink he was one step closer to an early grave. He'd been an alcoholic for 30 years, just like his mother – and it killed her.

"I was dying but I couldn't stop drinking," he says.

"Mom was an alcoholic and sadly died an alcoholic. Over the years I also became a burnt-out drunk. I was hopeless."

Hunger was a constant companion while living on the streets of New South Wales, Australia, so when Chris was told he could get a free dinner at the neighborhood Salvation Army, he made a beeline for it.

And that was where Chris met Salvation Army officer (Retired) Major Steve.

"Steve challenged me to pour out my grog and that's how it all started," Chris tells the Salvation Army magazine.

"I poured out three bottles of beer and a bottle of rum on the steps of The Salvation Army. I had a massive anxiety attack. I tried every excuse not to, but I did it."

That simple but courageous act proved the turning point for Chris – though there were other factors in

play. He had not been brought up in a religious family, but somehow he knew to pray to God.

"Sometimes in my drunken stupor I'd say, 'Please God, don't let me keep doing this,'" he shares.

Not long after meeting Major Steve, Chris served time in prison even though he prayed he might somehow avoid it.

He was disappointed he didn't get the outcome he prayed for, but God was at work in His own way – it was in jail that Chris began to experience some success in his efforts to overcome his drinking.

"I wasn't going to be able to stop drinking without going to prison," says Chris. "I know that now. Prison turned into rehab and the set of circumstances that happened in jail weren't accidents."

While in prison, Chris was encouraged to pray for healing. He'd been battling hepatitis for 29 years – "my eyes were yellow, I was grey, my liver was swollen" – but the doctors

could not treat him because he was always drunk.

After finishing his prison sentence, Chris entered Adele House (now run by the Salvation Army) for rehabilitation and finally gave up his drinking.

"I'd prayed for healing to get rid of my hepatitis and I believed," says Chris, adding that he had faith God

could heal him. True enough, he shares that the doctors found no trace of the disease.

"When I got sober the doctors couldn't find the hepatitis. They said it's rare for it to go out of your body by itself without treatment."

Chris' life has been transformed since he committed himself to Jesus.

"When I was 45, I was full of hepatitis, I couldn't put two words together, I was unshaven, filthy dirty and was just existing," he says.

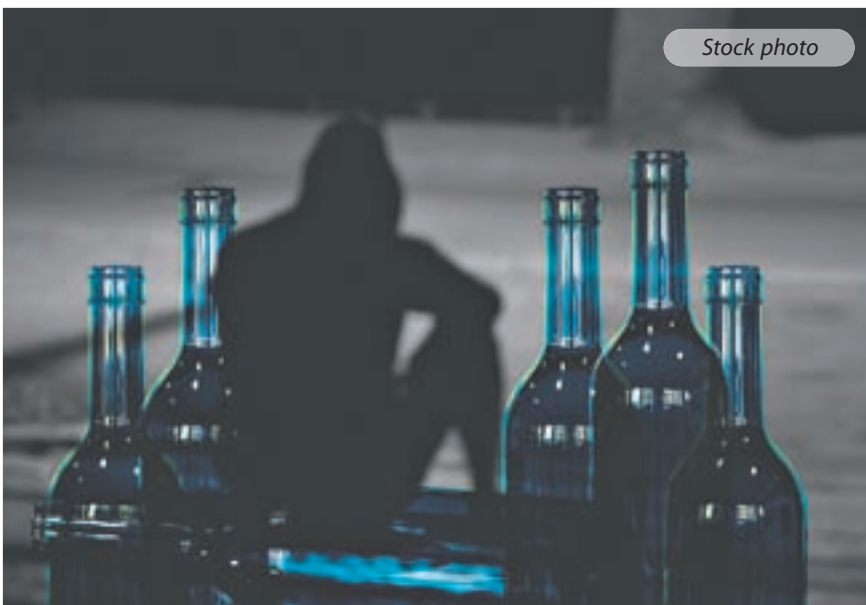
"But I've been born again. Not my old life fixed up a bit. A whole new life. Freedom ... Putting down the drink would have been enough, but I've got a whole lot more. I can talk to people now; I can look them in the eye ... My health is getting better, I'm losing weight.

"I'm so grateful for the suffering Jesus went through for us. It overwhelms me. It's the biggest sacrifice out of the love He has for us," he says.

It has been more than a decade since Chris poured out his drink on the steps of the Salvation Army in Coffs Harbour.

After God turned his life around, Chris joined a pub ministry and also became a member of the Salvation Army's motorbike chaplaincy group.

He shares the gospel (the good news that Jesus came to Earth to die for our sins), and tells them: "Don't give up. You can do this. I did it." •



Stock photo

“Don't give up. You can do this.”

## Don't settle for almost

• From page 1

Dawkins couldn't say for certain that God doesn't exist. He would know, as many should know, the evidence tells us God does exist.

Believing in the existence of God is the all important step in coming to know God.

The Bible says: "...for those who come to God must believe that He is, and that He rewards those who diligently seek him."

### Almost persuaded

I read a quotation in a secular magazine which said, "to be almost saved is to be totally lost."

It reminded me of King Agrippa in the New Testament before whom the imprisoned apostle Paul appeared. After hearing about Paul's faith Agrippa said, "You have almost persuaded me to be a Christian." (Acts 26:28)

To which the prisoner said, "I would to God, that not only you, but also all who hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

Paul had once been as anti-Christian as any man but, having met the risen Christ on the Damascus Road was so persuaded himself, that all the opposition and persecution thrown at him couldn't shake him.

Jesus Christ gave His all to save you from your sins – even suffering on a Roman cross. There was no almost with Jesus.

Don't settle for almost in the issue of faith – eternity is at stake!

See the box on page 7 for assistance in how to be fully committed to Christ and saved for all of eternity. •

## Prison chaplain's search for answers

Erick Langat is a prison chaplain who speaks light into inmates suffering in darkness and shares the good news of Jesus's death and resurrection to anyone who will listen. Today, he says that God has immensely blessed him, his work and his family.

Things were not always smooth sailing, though. Before Erick came to know Jesus personally, he went through a stage of searching.

Erick says, "I was the last born in a family of six brothers and three sisters. I was brought up in a Christian family. I went to Sunday school as a child and Bible camps as a teenager.

"I first heard about Jesus in my Sunday school class but I did not understand what needed to happen to make it real. I was just doing the 'right' thing and serving God without really knowing Him."

It was not until Erick had finished his primary school exams and moved up to high school that he had a realization that, just because his parents were Christians, it did not mean that he had a free ride to heaven. He needed to make that personal decision on his own.

This thought was further encouraged when he listened to a sermon during a rally and heard the Gospel [the good news of Jesus saving us from our sins] in full.

He responded to the altar call and got saved. "So, on the 2nd February, 2003, I gave my life to Christ," he relates.

"I saw that life without Christ is useless. There were verses like Romans 5 and verse 8 that spoke to me. *'But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'*"

“To come to Christ is life changing.”

Erick previously struggled with ungratefulness. "Somebody would do something for me and I would not appreciate that they had helped me," he tells *Challenge*. Since his conversion, though, God has been working in Erick's life and helping him to overcome all of his struggles and sins.

"The biggest change in my life since that miraculous day is that I have been able to see that Christ has been with me throughout the whole of my life. I have no doubt about it," he proclaims joyously.

"The best part of being a Christian is the truth expressed in the Bible in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 17: *'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold all things have become new.'* I am now blessed with a family and have two kids."

Erick's favourite verse from the Bible is

Colossians 2:14, which says, 'Having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; He [Jesus] has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.'

"I would like to tell others that to come to Christ is life changing," he smiles. "Christ saves and He is the Lord of our lives, our Father, and our God. He is the Lord of our lives! The grace of God is sufficient for all." •

Erick Langat



### About Crossroads

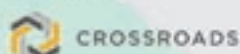
The Crossroads Prison Ministries mentorship program connects you with mentors who help you study the Bible.

Mentors write to you, answer your questions, share stories from their own lives, help you see how God is speaking to you through His Word and encourage you to continue to grow in your faith.

Through the mentorship program, Crossroads offers more than one dozen different correspondence Bible study courses that each contain up to 14 lessons.

Each course is designed to help you learn more about God and how to follow Him.

If you are interested in joining the program, please fill out the attached application form and mail it to us today!



Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
First Last

ID #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: MM | DD | YYYY      Earliest Release Date: MM | DD | YYYY

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_      Complete Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Referred by: CHAL      Institution \_\_\_\_\_      Housing \_\_\_\_\_

Prefiero el curso en español.      Street or PO Box \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_      State \_\_\_\_\_      ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

#### STUDENT COMMITMENT

I will finish each lesson I receive in a timely manner and, with the help of my mentors, I will complete each course that I start. I agree that Crossroads may use anything I submit, such as my picture, testimony, writings or artwork, for promotional purposes or to further its mission.

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_      Date \_\_\_\_\_

When you have completed this form, please return it to:  
Crossroads Prison Ministries | PO Box 900 | Grand Rapids, MI 49509-0900  
Crossroads Prison Ministries Canada | PO Box 5037 | Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

# I WAS THE LOWEST OF THE LOW

**M**y name is Stuart\* and I have been in jail now for just a bit over five years. I was arrested in 2017 and I will serve a total of eight years.

Before coming to jail I had let sin [wrongdoing against God] take over my life completely. Drugs, alcohol, lust, and greed were my downfall. In my eyes, and everyone else's, I was a complete failure. My life was a disaster and I had let my family, friends, and community down in a huge way. I hung my head in shame, and lived a life of regret. I was disowned by everyone I had ever loved, everyone except my older sister and her husband, who still cared for me.

I was angry, wild, scared, worried, broken-hearted, sorry, and another thousand emotions.

Thoughts ran through my head – I knew no one, had no one, I wished my life would just end there and then.

So, I withdrew into myself, put on a brave face and stayed out of trouble when I could. But the tension kept rising and I felt that I was going to snap.

Then one day a chaplain came into our pod. A lot of the other guys seemed to like him and showed him respect.

I watched on with interest as he spoke to a few of the guys and prayed with them. He then introduced himself to me. He said if I needed to talk about anything he would come back when he could. He also said I could request a Bible.

Then he prayed for my family and friends.

When he had finished he said, "Stuart, God loves you." I was taken back for a second. I didn't know what to do. I gave an awkward smile and walked out.

I wondered how anybody could love me, let alone God. I was the lowest of the low!

Strangely, over the next few weeks I kept thinking about that. "Stuart, God loves you."

About a month later I had the worst week ever. I had been coping torment, ridicule, and threats of violence and hate from some inmates, which led to mental stress and anxiety.

Then one week it was so hot and humid that you slept in your own sweat. There was no breeze and to top it off my fan had broken and the TV had also packed it in too. I was so bored I was going out of my mind!

The next day I filled out a request form asking for a Bible, just so I had something to read!

That night was the first time in a long time that I prayed to God. I asked for help, even if it was only a working fan.

I pleaded for something to change in my life.

Later that night it began to rain, and I fell asleep in the cool night air.

Strangely, the next day, one of the other inmates asked me to double up with him. He had a working TV and fan in the cell, so it didn't take me much convincing to move.

There was one rule, however – he watched church on TV every Sunday morning. That night I was watching TV as the fan blew cold air around the cell and I felt that things had definitely changed.

The next morning my Bible arrived!

During the day you are locked out of your sleeping cell into the common room.

I laid down on the floor near the

vents under the fan and I opened the Bible for the first time in over 30 years.

I started to read about Jesus and his followers. I got down to Matthew 5:43-48 where Jesus teaches about loving your enemies. Before I knew it I was reading about repenting (turning away from sin), confessing, Jesus dying on the cross for my sin, and how they crucified Him on the cross.

Then I read about how He rose again. I remember thinking there was so much more in the Bible than I remembered as a kid!

But I could remember all the stuff I had done wrong in my life, all the sin and crime, all the pain and hurt I had caused – and it cut me to the bone!

I felt pain so deep in my chest I thought I was having an anxiety attack. I couldn't blame this feeling on alcohol or drugs as I hadn't had anything for over eight months now.

I asked myself why I felt so empty.

At that moment I realized I was lost. But then those words that the chaplain said came back to me "Stuart, God loves you!"

I think that was the first time I was convicted by [God] the Holy Spirit, I knew right then that I had to confess

and repent (turn away from my sin) to Jesus for all my sins, and ask Him to come into my life.

So as I lay on the floor, I placed the Bible on my chest and closed my eyes. I silently prayed to Jesus and asked Him to forgive me of all my sins and to save me. I pleaded to be saved and asked forgiveness, while forgiving all those who had hurt me. I asked for God's help in asking for forgiveness from all those I had hurt.

I had lost everything I loved, but in doing so, I found the one who loves me unconditionally.

I prayed for Jesus to lead me forevermore and to change me, heart and mind. So now I follow Jesus, He is my Savior.

Jesus has changed me in so many ways, I am no longer that angry man I was. My fear and worry has all but gone, and I am growing in strength, belief, and faith daily.

My prayer life has exploded! I pray to the Lord every day and I now do Bible study courses and go to church meetings in my sector each week.

I am not sure what will happen tomorrow or the next day. I just take one day at a time, with Jesus in my heart. I trust my future to Him and accept what may come my way.

\*Name has been changed

The original of this story can be found at [www.prisonfellowship.org.au](http://www.prisonfellowship.org.au) and it is used with kind permission.



Stock photo

**“ I wondered how anybody could love me. ”**

## Satan worshipping murderer turns his back on his old life

**T**rompie Viljoen is in prison on a string of convictions – murder, attempted murder, assault and possession of ammunition – and has served 13 years of a 24-year sentence.

The 34-year-old tells *Challenge News* he was full of anger all the time. "I was worshipping Satan, using drugs and doing all the wrong stuff you can think of."

Trompie grew up with his grandmother, whom he says "was the best ever". But she died when he was 12 and the young boy was sent to live with his father, who had been in jail for killing Trompie's mother.

"I never really had a bond with him and ran away from home more times than I can count on my fingers," he shares. "I started using drugs and messed up my life ever since."

Trompie's life continued to be "a mess" until the night several months ago when he had a terrifying nightmare.

"I was trapped in the darkest of the darkest," he recalls. "I woke up scared to death and sweating."

The next day he attended the prison church service. Early in 2023, after attending church regularly, Trompie committed his life to Jesus Christ.

"I always knew there was a God but it was in prison where I met the one and only true God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

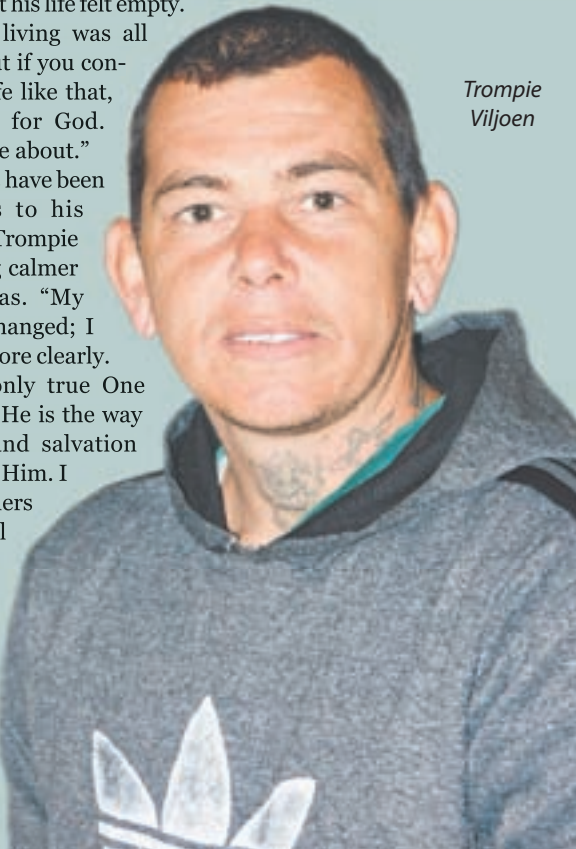
"Now I know the name of God Almighty as the great I AM (Exodus 3:14). Through the blood of Jesus you shall be saved. There is no other way," he declares.

Trompie says the reason he became a Christian was that his life felt empty.

"The life I was living was all good and fun, but if you continue to live a life like that, there's no time for God. That's what I care about."

Although there have been some obstacles to his newfound faith, Trompie says he is feeling calmer than he ever has. "My whole life has changed; I see everything more clearly.

"God is the only true One you can rely on. He is the way and the truth and salvation only comes from Him. I would say to others 'be true to God all the time because He knows you better than you know yourself.'"



Trompie Viljoen

## Now everything is possible

**“A**ll I wanted was money, power and respect until one day I opened the Bible...” says Tebogo Makgamatha, a prisoner at Devon Correctional Centre.

"I used to hear about God when I was growing up, but I didn't know His purpose until I attended a church service at Sun City Prison.

"Every Sunday pastors would come from different churches and preach the Gospel [good news about Jesus] to prisoners.

"I decided to become a Christian because I don't want to go to hell and burn for eternity. God promises to give us a new earth and heaven and take away all the pain. I will finally get to see the grace of God, the Creator Himself and worship Him forever.

"I repented of my actions and confessed my sins to God [and asked Him to] forgive me for all of the wrong things that I've done. I prayed that God would guide me to the path of eternal life. I know now that with God everything is possible.

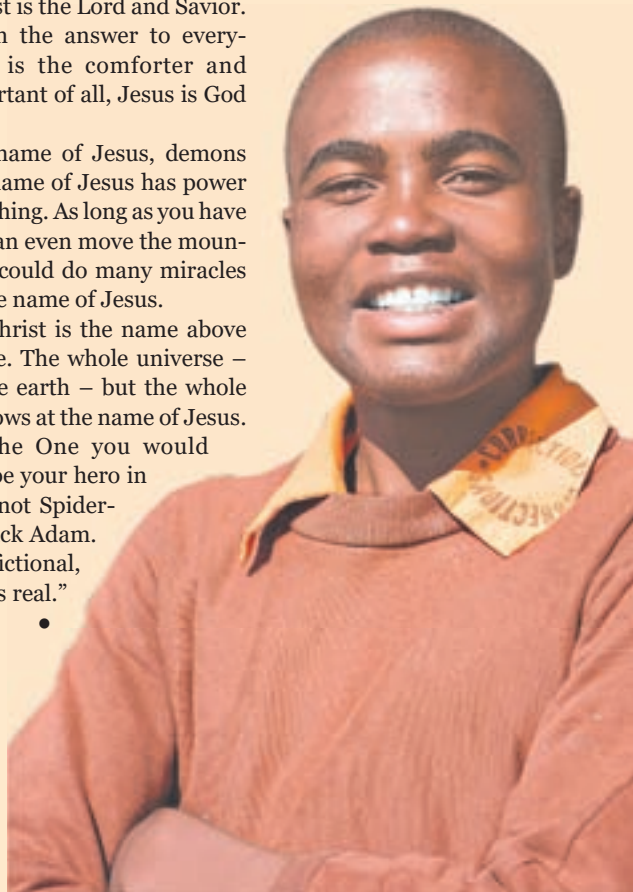
"Since committing my life to Christ I finally found my purpose in life and I now have joy in my heart..."

Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior.

"Jesus in the answer to everything. He is the comforter and most important of all, Jesus is God Himself.

"In the name of Jesus, demons bow. The name of Jesus has power over everything. As long as you have faith you can even move the mountains. You could do many miracles through the name of Jesus.

"Jesus Christ is the name above every name. The whole universe – not just the earth – but the whole universe bows at the name of Jesus. Jesus is the One you would choose to be your hero in this life – not Spider-man or Black Adam. These are fictional, but Jesus is real."



Tebogo Makgamatha

## In jail with Jesus

By Kenny

Alone one night  
In shame and despair  
I looked for my help  
But no one was there,  
No future...but prison  
No past...but pain  
I looked in the mirror  
My tears...the rain  
By justice condemned  
In time to die  
My only hope God's Mercy  
For his grace I cry...  
Then a seed planted  
Somewhere long ago  
In the midst of my sorrows  
Began to grow...  
This seed was Christ  
Who died for me  
In jail with Jesus  
I am set free...  
No longer in the hell  
Of my sinful ways  
He has made me a new person  
Who loves and prays  
Though seasons come  
And holidays pass  
In jail with Jesus  
My hope does last...  
So, I do share  
With you my friend  
In jail with Jesus  
It's not the end!

Mo Lalakobau

## Son comes home

After 13 years living in chaos, Mo Lalakobau had given up. He gave up on himself, on his future, on his life.

“By that time I was thinking to myself ‘I don’t care whatever comes my way, even if death is out there.’ I was going to allow my life to just go nowhere.”

Mo was born in Fiji and moved to Australia with his family when he was a young boy. His father was a Methodist minister and ultimately they settled in the Sydney suburb of Haberfield.

“My cousins tell me I could swear fluently in several dialects,” he tells Michael Cruz Caudre on the Everyday Fijians podcast. “Of course, that’s nothing to be proud of,” he chuckles.

He grew up in church but in 2006 he turned his back on his family faith - and thus began his descent into the chaos that almost broke him.

His life spiraled. He went to jail three times. “I was totally out of control. “I was out of position with God. I’d left Him and I hid in my work, in the drink and in the parties. I went from driving offences, to spending time in jail with people who were on life sentences!”

“In prison I’d see my friends die or get addicted, because in jail you’d come in and leave addicted. This was the environment I was in.”

Things could have ended very badly indeed, but they didn’t because, Mo says, while he had abandoned God, God hadn’t abandoned him.

“Throughout I could hear the voice of God calling out to me, ‘Son where are you? Do you understand what’s happening to you?’

“I started to look at everything around me to look at where my life was. I kept hearing God saying to me ‘Son do you really understand what’s happening?’ I had totally given up on myself but He hadn’t.”

That voice became louder and louder and soon drowned out other voices which told Mo he was a loser, that God didn’t care about him and didn’t love him.

After his release from prison in 2019 he went to a church where he heard a sermon about the prodigal son. The parable Jesus told in Luke 15: 11-32 is about a father who waits and welcomes his son after years of wayward living.

Mo realised this was God’s way of calling out to him and he re-dedicated his life to Christ.

Now a minister at a church in Sydney, Mo’s messages draw often from the theme of redemption.

“There’s nothing that God can’t do... I stand here today to tell you how good our God is, I understand now who the source of my life is. I understand now. Hallelujah! I understand the source of my being.

“I don’t deserve to be here, but if God can change a sinner like me, who was in jail a few years ago...He can change anyone.”

“I had totally given up on myself but He hadn’t.”

BY LOU HAVILAND

As Brandon stood with his older brother and cousins on a Florida corner asking passers-by for spare change, he looked for someone to blame for his circumstances.

“How did we get to this place where we’re panhandling on the street?” he asked himself.

Brandon had faulted God through most of his life when things didn’t work out - even as a child, when the weather wasn’t windy enough to fly his kite. He also blamed God for his family’s choices that had claimed his parents’ marriage as well as the lives of beloved family members.

But Brandon would come to realize that the One he had been blaming was actually orchestrating a second chance that would open doors to a new life.

### In dad’s footsteps

Brandon was the baby of his family, which consisted of his parents and a brother who was 10 years older. There was seemingly nothing Brandon wished for that his father wouldn’t give him.

“It was an adventure when I was a kid,” Brandon remembers. “I was kind of spoiled. My parents bought me the first Nintendo when it came out. I had a go-kart. I had a pool in the backyard. All my friends would come over and we would play football and baseball.”

Brandon idolized his father, a construction company owner and kick-boxing state champion. He longed to be just like him. But at the age of nine, Brandon discovered another side to his dad. He realized his father was operating a side business selling drugs to all his employees. By his early teens, Brandon had experienced drugs firsthand.

“I remember the very day that I started to smoke pot with my dad,” Brandon says. “He was soft-spoken and said, ‘I’d rather you smoke with me than go out and do it.’”

Soon, Brandon and his father were joined by his brother and his father’s two younger brothers, who lived with them from time to time.

Marijuana wasn’t the only drug being misused by the family, as Brandon eventually grasped when both of his uncles died of overdoses.

The dark side of the habit that had drawn his family together had reared its head. Not only had it taken his uncles’ lives, but it also prompted Brandon’s mother, who did not use drugs, to seek a divorce from his father.

Brandon, his brother, and their father were on their own. They lived and worked together - and eventu-

ally, ended up homeless together.

### A message of hope

Brandon had completed community service as a teen for possession of marijuana, but it wasn’t until his 20s that he began to face longer prison sentences.

“I began stealing to support my habit,” Brandon says. “I ended up going to prison for a year and a day.”

After serving his sentence, Brandon was reunited with his father and brother.

“I began stealing to support my habit.”

“There was no other place to go, and we just took our things and we lived in the woods,” he recalls. “That was two years of being on the streets.”

Then Brandon visited a local church, which welcomed those without a home to come refresh themselves with a shower, a bed, and the news of God’s love for them.

“I hated it because everybody was singing and they were happy,” Brandon remembers. “I was miserable because I was homeless, and I was a drug addict.” Brandon continued stealing, this time resulting in a five-year sentence. Though he would read the Bible from time to time, he was still using drugs behind bars.

### Surrender behind bars

While smoking marijuana in a prison community room with his headphones on and Bible open, Brandon says that God reached out to him through the haze of smoke - specifically as a song, *White Flag*, by Christian artist Chris Tomlin, played on the radio.

“It talked about this battle that rages in our rebel heart, this fight that we cannot win. We wave our white flag. We surrender all,” Brandon says of the lyrics. “I felt it was God’s way of telling me I need to surrender.”

Brandon obeyed. Shortly after he decided to follow God, volunteers began coming into the prison - one of whom was from Prison Fellowship.

# A white flag and a second chance



Pastor Doug Ryan led Bible studies at the prison. As he saw Brandon grow in his faith and desire to serve, Doug asked him to lead a Bible study.

During this season of new beginnings, Brandon received a call from his mother. His brother had overdosed and died. Earlier in life, Brandon would have blamed God for this devastating news. But he wasn’t the same man.

“I just had to trust that God was good,” he says. “At that time, because of my relationship with God, I knew God was good.”

Doug was there to pray with Brandon through his grief. “I’ll never forget that moment, because I realized that it was God reaching out to me through him,” Brandon recalls.

### Persevering to a second chance

After his release, Brandon found part-time work at a paint franchise, and thanks to his hard work, eventually earned a promotion to warehouse manager. He was grateful for his work, but his heart couldn’t forget those he left behind bars. He was eager to return, this time as a minister of the gospel. Initially visiting prisons as a volunteer, Brandon now works full time for Prison Fellowship as a field director.

### Breaking generational cycles

Brandon met his wife in church where he had been serving as an usher and she as a children’s ministry coordinator. They have been married over four years and have two young children. Brandon is close to his mother and prays with her regularly. He’s also close with his father, who suffered a stroke but is now free from the drugs he once used.

“Now the joy that I have is helping somebody else in the position I was in to overcome the same circumstances and trials.”

Brandon gives thanks for God’s mercy and the second chances that made his new life possible.

The original of this story can be found at [www.prisonfellowship.org](http://www.prisonfellowship.org) and it is used with kind permission.



Brandon now works for Prison Fellowship Academy and helps guide prisoners through biblically based curriculum that helps incarcerated men and women lead lives of purpose and productivity inside and outside of prison.

nudge

WITH KARL FAASE

## Do you need a fresh start?

**HOW** much do you appreciate forgiveness or a fresh start? Many people take this for granted because they have never really needed to know big forgiveness.

There have been times when news stories have reminded me that there are those of us who are desperate for a fresh start.

Like the week when a young mum driving near a school hit and killed a five-year-old boy.

This was the same week that a dad put his seven-year-old in the car outside an American gun shop. He got into the car and put his handgun down next to him; the gun discharged killing his son.

How much would these two people want forgiveness and a fresh start? How much would they be desperate to know freedom?

We can know this in Jesus; it’s promised and delivered. Take the chance to experience God’s grace today.

# WORDS FOR THE HEART

## STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Welcome to this Bible Study. Read slowly what I have written. If you have a Bible, look up the reference verses given, and allow the Holy Spirit to minister to your soul through them. – ALAN BAILEY

### Mark 1:21-45

#### INTRODUCTION

OUR last study was the first one based on Mark's Gospel. We looked at Chapter 1, verses 1 to 20. It is a fast-moving report on what Jesus did from the outset of His ministry. John the Baptist spoke about Him, then we read of His baptism and temptation and the calling of the first disciples. We will go on to find that the narrative moves quickly and shows what a great impact Jesus made wherever He went. A fascinating journey is before us!

**Verses 21-22** "They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law."

The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, and the synagogue was the building in which the Jews met for worship. The people could recognise that Jesus was different from their usual teachers. He had an authority which they lacked. The truth had

unusual power that could be felt.

**Verses 23-26** "Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!' 'Be quiet!' said Jesus sternly. 'Come out of him!' The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek."

The Bible makes clear that there are demons who are active on earth. They are fallen angels involved with Satan. It seems that they increased in their activity when Jesus was on earth. The man had the demon in his life in such a way that he lacked control over his words and actions.

The spirit understood who Jesus was and reacted with surprise and concern. In dismissing him, Jesus showed His divine authority, something not seen before by the people.

**Verses 27, 28** "The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits, and they obey Him.' News about Him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee."

This was one of the early signs, or miracles, which Jesus did, making it obvious that He was no ordinary man. He said that He had come from God and signs like this confirmed it. No-



him. Such a wonderful connection between pure holiness and deep human need. What a miracle this was! It seemed like the impossible happening.

**Verses 43-35** "Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 'See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.' Instead, he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to Him from everywhere."

We can see the reason why Jesus didn't want the man to advertise his healing as it brings insistent

crowds. It is not that Jesus didn't like being overwhelmed with people and their needs to the point where He was unable to choose what He wanted to do. In other words, crowds had the ability to trap a person and there is no easy way to escape. So going to lonely places or even to hiding places was a necessity. But even so, there were those individual people who searched and found Him. The reference to Moses and sacrifice concerns a ritual of the Old Testament law regarding leprosy.

#### CONCLUSION

We are beginning to experience the fast pace of Mark's record. But we mustn't allow the speed to make us miss very deep truths. Reading the gospels raises the central question "Who is this man Jesus?" How do we see Him? Do we believe His words? What are His miracles telling us? And so on. How we answer is of real importance to us as it was to the people of the day. We will continue in chapter two.

one before Him had shown this kind of authority.

**Verses 29-31** "As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So, he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them."

Another miracle follows straight on after the first. Jesus has power over sickness. It is clear that the healing was not gradual, as it might have been otherwise, but it happened in an instant. The woman was immediately well. We also begin to see that the Lord Jesus was merciful and compassionate, doing good to people.

**Verses 32-34** "That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but He would not let the demons speak because they knew who He was."

It didn't take long for word to spread about Jesus and His power to heal. We can imagine excited crowds gathering, not only to see what was happening but to bring sick folk with hope in their hearts of a new beginning. How much good cheer this must have created. People all going their way having experienced a miracle. The evil beings were being stirred and losing their grip.

**Verses 35-37** "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for Him, and when they found Him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'"

In the four gospels we are told how Jesus kept continual touch with His Father in heaven.

He deliberately found privacy where He could speak with God the Father. In this case, He also wanted to have some relief from the crowd who would pursue Him day and night if they had the chance. So, he maintained a balance between being with crowds and being alone with the Father.

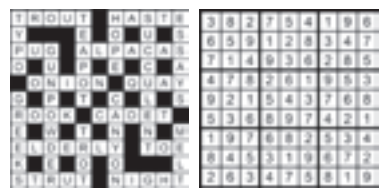
**Verses 38, 39** "Jesus replied, 'Let's go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.' So, He travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons."

We can see that the Lord did not want to get caught up with one group of people who would demand of Him, but He wished to go to other

people to share with them. Note that He named preaching as the thing He was first of all wanting to do. He had a message to spread. It was to do with God's plan and how people needed to shape up to it. God being righteous and people needing to repent (to turn away from) their sins. So began a ministry which kept moving for the next three years. The four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell us about it.

**Verses 40-42** "A man with leprosy came to Him and begged Him on his knees, 'If You are willing, You can make me clean.' Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' He said, 'Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cured."

This disease was most unpleasant with skin and flesh being eaten away. It was regarded as contagious though this was hardly true. People rarely got over it, so their case was sad. This man had faith to believe that Jesus could heal him, so he boldly made his move. People kept strictly apart from lepers, but Jesus reached out and touched



## HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ

We read in God's word: "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)

|                                 |  |                |
|---------------------------------|--|----------------|
| <b>OUR PROBLEM:</b>             | <b>Separation from God</b><br>"Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect" (Romans 3:23)                                 | <b>ADMIT</b>   |
| <b>GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION:</b> | <b>Jesus died on the cross</b><br>"God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)               | <b>BELIEVE</b> |
| <b>OUR RESPONSE:</b>            | <b>Trust Jesus by receiving Him</b><br>"To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12) | <b>COMMIT</b>  |

Here is an example of how you can pray.

Dear Father in Heaven. I come to you now because I want to be saved. Please, forgive me of my sins. I believe that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die for me and that you have raised him from the dead. I now ask Jesus Christ to come into my life as my Saviour and Lord. Take control of my life. Please make me the person You created me to be. In Jesus Christ's name. Amen

**The Lord Jesus says: "I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in me has eternal life." (John 6:47).**  
He gives life of a wonderful quality that continues forever.

#### What now?

1. Tell someone - either a fellow prisoner who is a Christian, or your Prison Chaplain.
2. Ask a friend or family member to bring you a Bible. Ask the Prison Chaplain to sign you up to a correspondence discipleship program.
3. Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening, and you don't need a formula.
4. Find out if your prison has church services and attend them regularly.

**AS A NEXT STEP:**

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE]

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

\* Please check and write clearly \*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: Challenge Literature Fellowship, 2634 Drake Road, Lebanon Ohio, 45036

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

## ARE WE QUALIFIED?

BY PASTOR MERVYN APPADU

**FOR** many people, paper qualifications have become all-important. Some even resort to purchasing a degree so they can present themselves with the "right qualifications".

Some have even resorted to fraud and misrepresentation by falsifying certificates and buying forged qualifications. Others get honorary degrees.

Someone who had never been to university once expressed jokingly that he had studied at INOGO University of Hawaii.

He then explained to me that it was his way of expressing "I no go to university" in poor, broken English. It made me wonder if I should put MWQ (My Wife's Qualifications) as one of my credentials!

As I considered the importance of qualifications, I thought about the qualifications that would impress God. Do we need qualifications before we can serve Him?

As the Lord brought my attention to Isaiah 6, I found that His question, "Whom shall I send?" and Isaiah's response, "Here I am, send me", occurred after Isaiah had repented [turned away from his wrongdoing] and God had forgiven him.

I began to realise that whom God forgives, He also asks to serve Him.

The "qualification" God seeks in His servants is a repentant heart. This idea is affirmed in Hebrews 9:14, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Repentance, forgiveness and readiness are far more important qualifications than paper qualifications.





*Beneil Dariush of Iran punches Mateusz Gamrot of Poland in a lightweight fight during the UFC 280 event at Etihad Arena on October 22, 2022 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. (Photo by Chris Unger/Zuffa LLC/Getty Images)*

# TOUGH GUY FINDS TRUE GRIT

**M**ixed martial artist Beneil Dariush is currently ranked No.4 in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) lightweight rankings but eight years ago he was pursuing a different sport.

Beneil and his family moved from their farm in Iran to America when he was nine. At 18 he began training in Brazilian jiu-jitsu and earned his black belt in five years. He became a no-gi world champion as a blue, purple, and brown belt.

He explains in an interview with Run N Tell on YouTube that he moved to UFC when he was 25 after his mother confided in him that the family was struggling financially.

"It's okay mom, I got it," Beneil told his mother.

"Then I went into my room and I sat down and I was like, 'Why did I say that? What am I gonna do?'"

Beneil considered quitting fighting and getting a 9-5 job but he hated the idea.

"I was in such a bad place, I actually started to pray," he recalls.

Beneil had been raised attending an Aramaic church at Easter and Christmas but he says it was more of a "cultural thing".

"So I just was like, 'Alright God, if You're real, if You're up there, give me something.' A week or two later, I got a call for a professional fight in Brazil."

The only problem was that it was a professional MMA fight and at that point, Beneil had only trained in jiu-jitsu.

But when he was offered the opportunity to fight MMA, he says, "I didn't want to sound like a wimp,"

and agreed.

Beneil began training immediately for the fight, which was in six weeks.

Against the odds, he won the fight and the pay cheque that went with it. He remembers handing it over to his mother with pride until he realized his winnings wouldn't last forever. There were payments to be made every month.

"I went back into my room and I prayed again and I was just like, 'Alright, You did it once, but I need another one. I don't know if You're really up there. I need to know if that was really You.'"

Then he had a call from a friend, asking if Beneil could train with him. He agreed and after their first

session, the friend insisted on paying Beneil.

"All of a sudden I was working with him three or four times a week. I got another coaching job somewhere else — they just kept offering me jobs to teach and all while still fighting."

Beneil was making enough money to survive which was bolstered every now and again by his fight wins. He says he started to feel guilty that it seemed as though he received everything he prayed for and wondered what God wanted from him in return.

He remembered an old wrestling coach he had who was also a pastor, Josh Holiday, and gave him a call.

Josh invited him to come to church and Beneil showed up the next weekend — dressed in his Sunday best.

"[Josh] was wearing just jeans and a T-shirt and I was like, 'Okay I may have made a mistake here!' But I sat through the service. I was very uncomfortable."

"The music wasn't something I was used to, the message wasn't something I was used to... but then I showed up again the next week and the next week and the next week and as I was showing up something was happening. I kept hearing about Jesus and the sacrifice and the cross. So I picked up my Bible and I started reading it."

Beneil read the entire Bible from front to back.

He says he "started to understand

the cross". When he finished reading it, he started again.

"At the same time I gave my life to the Lord," he shares.

Beneil now says he recognises that his talents come from God.

**“ I don't fight out of hate anymore. ”**

"The whole purpose of my career is to point to my Lord and Savior Jesus," he says in an interview with Brian Sumner.

"People forget fighting isn't just violence. It

doesn't necessarily mean violence if two people stop for a fight — it all depends on their intentions ... I believe fighting is the ultimate form of competition ...

"I don't fight out of hate anymore, I don't fight out of anger anymore — I focus on being disciplined. I focus on what is my motivation and what is my goal. The goal is to

glorify God."

Last year a video of Beneil went viral regarding his comments about Iranian protestors.

The demonstrations started in September when a woman was arrested for allegedly ignoring the government's requirements to wear hijabs or head coverings. She died in custody three days later.

"My people in Iran, I know you are struggling," he said in an in-cage interview. "I know you are fighting for freedom. I want you guys to know we're praying for you and we love you."

He went on to say, "There is true freedom — a freedom that no one can take from you — in the name of Jesus Christ, the son of God. Don't ever forget that. If you remember one thing I say, remember that."

Some news outlets referred to his final comments as "bizarre", but for Beneil, his faith is the foundation of his life.



*Beneil Dariush (photo by Chris Unger/Zuffa LLC).*

**DISTRIBUTED BY:**