

# MY FATHER WAS A CONNMAN

Candice Curry grew up with a father she could never trust: a conman who always had a scheme going and a slick argument; who frequently came home with other people's cars or lived in other people's homes; who lied compulsively; kept moving his family around to avoid authorities; and cheated and manipulated whomever he could. A man who was often high or drunk, and always unpredictable.

Candice had felt particularly betrayed by an incident that happened in her teens, when her father entrusted her into the care of one of his friends who ended up raping her.

And yet she deeply loved her dad, longed for his approval and affection and was heartbroken when he finally ended his life - having alienated two wives and five children - by hanging himself in a hotel room when Candice was 36.

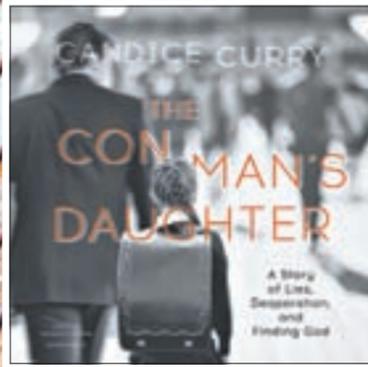
A year before her dad died, Candice had come into a relationship with her spiritual dad - God - but it was a slow process for her to let go the expectations of a daddy's girl and realise that all her needs for affirmation and love were fulfilled in her Heavenly Father.

From that place of wholeness, she was then able to forgive her earthly father and let go of her bitterness, anger and disappointment.

The change came about during her second marriage, shortly after she had given birth to triplets.

She explains: "I started to take the kids to the church across the street.

I wasn't trying to be a good mom. I just needed the break it gave me from the kids."



Candice Curry.  
LEFT: The cover of Candice's book, available on Amazon.

## What's the time in your house?

Roy Brereton was in a children's home from the age of nine to 12 and a half. His father was in jail and his mother had abandoned him at nine months old.

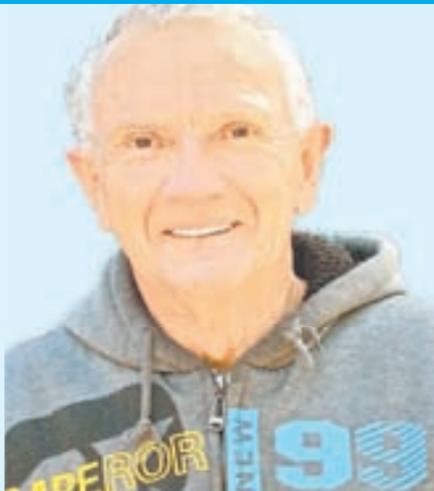
"This [situation] only built hardness in me as Mum never wanted me unless I could further her bank balance [through child support payments]," Roy shares sadly.

Roy was smoking at the age of eight and drinking wine heavily by age 15. He was in and out of prison and had a rebellious attitude.

"One day, I walked past a church fence which had a sign on it," Roy recalls. "It said, 'What is the time?' And, then beneath it, 'It's time to seek the Lord.'"

"That became my saying to anyone who asked the time from me. Later, a girl at work gave me a Bible but none of it made sense to me."

Roy says that he laughed at people who tried to 'push religion'.



"But somewhere deep down was this belief about Jesus dying for my sin."

At 32, Roy was married and had two little boys, aged 18 months and seven days old.

"Around this time, I argued with my wife about my drinking," he admits. "I left home and took all that was in the house, including our two cars. I even had our washing machine! The only thing I left

behind was a clothes dryer so Maureen [my wife] could dry the nappies.

"I drove over 500 kilometres away where I got a job."

A great depression came over Roy. He agreed to go to a Bible study with a good friend. While he was there, Roy heard a man quote from the Biblical book of Acts chapter 16, verse 31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household."

"The Spirit of God speared those three words, 'And your house,' into my heart," Roy states.

"I knew I was immediately saved [rescued from my sin by Jesus]. It was my house, my wife and my two boys, who were not saved.

"I felt the Holy Spirit prompting me to go back home to my wife and sons so they could see what I had just experienced."

Roy returned home and about six weeks later his wife became a Christian.

● Turn to page 4

She goes on: "I didn't want to make friends there; I just wanted to sit and be silent. I had no intention of getting involved. ... If they [got to know me, they would realise] how dark I was and what a mess I had made of my life. In my eyes, the people who walked the halls of the church had their lives altogether. I didn't fit in."

When Candice had had a pregnancy scare with the triplets and been told there was no heartbeat, she had lain in bed for seven days and begged God to spare her babies. Now she felt she had gone back on every vow she had made and was a miserable failure, whom God looked at with disappointment.

"My life was a mess and I needed help... My husband was tired and had given up on me...I failed him as a wife...Our marriage was spiralling out of control, and I didn't know how to fix it," Candice admits.

However, she continued to go to church every week for over a year. Her husband, however, was adamant that he would never set foot inside.

In 2010 their strained marriage was further tested when one of the triplets was diagnosed with autism. And that July, Candice found out Brandon had been cheating on her.

"All my life I had considered this the number one deal breaker," she relates. "But standing face-to-face ... an entirely different feeling came

over me - complete loss. Realising what we had done to our marriage over the years turned my anger into deep sadness. I knew that the level of forgiveness we needed to save our family was more than either of us possessed."

God stepped into the situation in the most bizarre way - by causing the home air conditioner to quit. For three days they were without AC in a Texas summer and the family had to all sleep together in the one room that had cooling. Instead of being pulled apart - Brandon and Candice were forced together and forced to treat each other with kindness in front of the children.

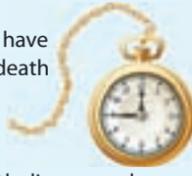
● Turn to page 2



# AN APPOINTMENT YOU MUST KEEP

BY ALAN BAILEY

**ALMOST** every new day brings us a reminder that our hold on life is very tenuous. The newspapers usually have more names in the death notices than in the births column. We hear of friends or relatives battling with disease and people being killed in accidents, wars and natural disasters.



**AN APPOINTMENT IN THE BOOK**

We won't have it written in our diary, but we can be sure that one day our life here will end. As God's Word says, "It is appointed to man once to die."

Many people take a fatalistic view of the solemn subject and brush it aside with comments like, "You can only die once." Or, "When your time is up, then, too bad, it's up."

All this is made to make us feel brave for the present with no deep thought required for the future. But what a trap this is! A trap always succeeds with the thoughtless.

**WHAT COMES NEXT**

If death itself holds little fear for some, what about the appointment that follows it? You see, the sentence quoted above says something else. "It is appointed to man once to die and after this the judgement" (Hebrews 9:27).

Some folk mistakenly think they have an appointment with an undertaker whom they will not be

able to see. Instead they have an appointment with God whom they will see. He will know all about them, nothing hidden. For so many, a life lived defying the rule of God.

**GROUNDLESS HOPES**

It is sad to hear people reassuring themselves when they have no basis for it. I mean people saying that they should be OK in God's view because they have lived fairly well. But it is God's standard that matters and He says our goodness is not enough. Our sin is a stark reality.

The majority of people are going to be sorely disappointed. Jesus said that the crowd is heading the wrong way. They are not all criminals, just people from suburbia who wash their cars and mow their lawns on Saturday.

**A GREAT REVELATION**

We will see God's utter purity and hatred for all evil. In contrast, we will see our denial of His authority and the way we have insisted on having our own way. This is great guilt.

There will be others who will never be judged like this. You can be among them. These people have turned from their own way and trusted Christ alone to save them. He stood in their place, took their judgement and condemnation.

That is what the cross was all about. The Sinless One took the place of the guilty. Alive again, He is "able to save completely those who come to God through Him." Come now.

# My father was a conman

● From page 1

On the third night, waiting for Brandon to come home from work, Candice lay in bed and heard the voice of God speak to her for the first time and "it made me want to plug my ears".

God told her what she didn't want to hear. "I heard Him say my name. He whispered how much He loved me but also told me that I didn't have the right to bail on my husband and my marriage."

Candice understood "my job, as the Christian – though conflicted – I had become, was to show my husband what true forgiveness and grace looked like. No matter how much it hurt or how difficult it was, God instructed me to stay and fix what I had broken."

"I knew for the very first time that my obedience to God wasn't about me and what I wanted; it was about loving others more than I loved myself."

When Brandon got home, Candice told him that she wasn't going anywhere and they spent the rest of the night in tears, talking and apologising to each other.

Two nights later, he asked if he could attend church with the family. On his second visit to church, when the preacher asked those who wanted to respond to Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and relation-



Candice Curry with her children. Find more on Candice at her website [candicecurry.com](http://candicecurry.com)

ship with Him to come to the front, Brandon grabbed Candice's hand and went forward.

"Just 12 days after we stood face-to-face in our kitchen and decided to divorce, we stood hand-in-hand in front of the entire congregation and I watched as my husband gave his life to Christ," says Candice. Then she confessed her own need for Jesus to



Candice and Brandon Curry.

live in her and that September they were both baptised [immersed in water] as an outward sign of their inward commitment.

Candice acknowledges that becoming a believer didn't make everything perfect or take away the struggle. "We continue to tread water more than we want, but now we see the shore, and on it stands our Saviour."

That safe place of belonging helped her to deal with her dad's suicide, testify in a later FBI investigation of her father and become a foster mother to her own half-sister.

After all her difficult experiences, Candice concludes her book "The Conman's Daughter" with these words: "None of our stories are pointless. None of us are a mistake or worthless... Even when we are walking through the fires of life, [God's] plan is always perfect and always leads to redemption. His love for us is beyond anything we will ever be able to understand here on earth. But it is real, and it is ours."

## Crossword

**ACROSS**

- 1 Store selling presents (4,4)
- 7 Brief calms
- 8 One sixteenth of a pound
- 9 Gold mass
- 10 University staff member
- 12 Property unit, old
- 14 Kidnap price
- 17 Butcher's leftovers
- 18 Aviator
- 19 Game plan

**DOWN**

- 1 Stalin era prison
- 2 Rankle
- 3 "Quit it!"
- 4 Title holder
- 5 Mongolia's capital (4,5)
- 6 Scent shop
- 11 Pancake with indentations
- 13 Fit out again
- 15 Hot-tasting
- 16 Dog hitchhiker

**SOLUTION PAGE 11**

# Reflections on a dry land

BY RICK LEWERS

**OH** that it would rain! I admit to not knowing a whole lot about sheep and cattle and seasonal crops but I have been a person for sixty years and farming people vocationally for thirty years of my working life. I hope that doesn't sound inappropriate and if it does please forgive me. But like a farmer who hates to see his stock in poor condition I am a person who hates to see any of God's people in similar condition. Sadly those two go hand in hand in times of drought.

People suggest that encouragement is found in the fact that everyone is experiencing the same stresses but I am not sure that a shared suffering is all that encouraging. I am not suggesting that suffering is a bad thing necessarily but I have never found the particulars of suffering all that encouraging. What I have learnt through it and what I have received in the midst of it.

There are some unassailable truths about Christianity that are worth considering in times when the less fragrant realities of life make it pretty dry and it's not just the animals that need a drink. Two immediately come to mind.

For a start suffering often educates the self-sufficient person that we are



not sufficient. It is as though God wired the world in such a way as to remind us of this. In fact, that is precisely what God did and frankly the wisdom of this protects us from ourselves becoming self-made gods that others have to fight with. Like one's stock is dependent on the farmer, so we are dependent upon God. We may not like to admit that we are dependent on God but even the staunchest unbeliever would love to know there is a God they can depend on. Even an unbeliever may pray for rain in a drought but rain might not be the first and most important thing for a self-sufficient person to have an answer to. Becoming dependent upon God may be the greatest lesson and encouragement of all.

Leaving God aside for a moment - which really is not possible and only exacerbates our problems - suffering often reminds us that we also need each other. It was John Dunne who

expressed in poetry those well-known words, "No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;" In drought a tell-tale sign that a person is not travelling well is their increasing isolation from others. At such times nothing could be more important than a friend. With that in mind, the second unassailable truth about Christianity is its teaching that people should be concerned for one another, to love your neighbour as you love yourself.

Of course Christianity when lived properly makes concern not a matter of mere words but a love that issues in practical acts of service and support.

Those who love English literature may wish to correct my understanding of John Dunne's poem but I am moved to remember, "any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind."

A drought reminds us all that we are dependent beings. We need God who showed His dependability on a cross and in His resurrection. And as those involved in mankind we are less, we are diminished when we suffer the loss of one another.

Suffering itself is not all that encouraging but when the sufferer learns who they can depend on and when mankind's love issues in practical acts of kindness, even in times of drought some of the best things can grow.

## Sudoku

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9.

Puzzle Level: Medium

				4				7
7				6		2		
	1						9	8
			1	3				
	8	6	5		7	4	2	
				4	6			
8	2						4	
		3		5				1
5			9					

**SOLUTION PAGE 11**

# DESPAIR TURNED TO HOPE

**B**y the time he was 25 years old, Nathaniel Burr's life was a mess. His world was full of drugs, crime and despair. "My drug addiction completely controlled my life and had ruined my mental and physical health. My only ambition was to get my hands on my next hit."

"I had two failed apprenticeships behind me and almost no relationship with my family. People always seemed to let me down and I hated myself," he says of that time.

Nathaniel had attended Sunday School as a child and heard about God but that just seemed to him a distant memory in a life that was full of pain and disappointment.

Not all his family had given up on him, however. Nathaniel was trying to get his life back on track and had booked into a residential rehabilitation program to deal with his drug problem. When the program director

Malcolm Smith visited Nathaniel's town to speak, his aunt encouraged him to go along and hear the talk.

"I turned up late and stood up the back feeling uncomfortable. I was surrounded by ordinary hard-working people and I felt very out of place. But when Pastor Malcolm spoke about drugs and dealers and talked about his experiences I was overcome with grief."

**I FELT TERRIBLE GRIEF ... FOR ALL THE PEOPLE I HAD HURT**

"I felt terrible grief for my life and for all the people I had hurt wittingly or unwittingly along the way. I felt deeply sorry to God for the way that I had lived."

Nathaniel couldn't stop crying. As the meeting drew to a close, the speaker invited people to find hope for a new life through a relationship with God.

"I broke down and cried like my heart had broken," Nathaniel remembers.

It was a turning point in his life because he started to follow Jesus. He no longer wanted to head in the wrong direction but wanted a changed heart.

"I knew in my heart that life was going to be different from that moment forward and it has been."

"Before there was fear, apathy and despair. Now I have life. I have a reason to live. I look forward to getting out of bed each morning."

Nathaniel celebrates the fact that he is growing as a person with a new attitude. He still has everyday challenges but he has a new approach to coping. He sees trouble as an obstacle to overcome and a chance to grow and develop with it.

In the past, when things got tough, he would look to drugs to dull the pain but now he looks to his daily relationship with God.

"God is the constant in my life. I know that I can always turn to God no matter what comes my way."

Nathaniel says his new life is summed up by the Bible in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 10: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect."

With God strengthening him each day in his new life, Nathaniel has gained a job as a youth worker and is completing a Health Science degree at university. These are achievements he never imagined would have been possible before.

He has also married a beautiful wife and together they encourage one another to keep walking with God every day.

Nathaniel and Chevonne Burr walk into their future together, having been individually healed by God from their past hurts and mistakes.



## Lost teen finds healing in her Forever Father

**B**y the time she was 16 Chevonne Burr had already lost two fathers. Her biological father, whom she never saw again after her parents' divorce, when she was three, and her stepfather after he lost a three-year fight against brain cancer.

"I did not take his death well," she remembers. "He had adopted me as his own and watching him suffer in pain for years, slowly deteriorating, was emotionally challenging and hard to deal with."

It was also spiritually hard to process. Chevonne had been exposed to Christianity through her stepfather's family. She had learnt about God's love for her in Sunday School and youth group but his death brought her to a crossroad in her relationship with God, whom she blamed for her loss.

"The next year was filled with alcohol and parties in an effort to numb the pain," Chevonne shares sadly. "During that year I knew that the way I had chosen to deal with this tragedy was not the right way. I had to decide whether I wanted to follow Jesus or follow the [ways of the] world."

At 18 Chevonne went to a Christian Creative Arts College where she rededicated her life to serving God and trained in music and dance, and how to use them as an avenue to reach young people with the good news story about Jesus.

That year her mother remarried, bringing a whole new set of challenges for Chevonne.

"Adjusting to a blended fam-



Chevonne Burr

ily was hard and at times I felt confused by the situation. I often battled rejection, anger and low self-worth," she recalls.

Her unsettled situation was further compounded when the family moved to Perth from South Africa when Chevonne was 20, and she followed two years later.

"Due to the instability in father figures in my life I had become prone to rejection. After immigrating I became worried that I would have to start all over again with friends, work and studies."

Desperate for belonging and stability "the idea of marriage became a great focus for me", she

admits. "I rushed into a relationship with a guy from church too quickly, although I had a sense that what I was doing was wrong. The relationship ended three months before we were to be married."

Chevonne began working in Christian ministry in Esperance, Western Australia.

"It was an invaluable time where God brought more healing to my life and freedom from the lies I was believing [about my lack of value and un-lovableness]."

"I had the opportunity to share the love of Jesus with so many broken women and to witness God move in their lives. Sometimes I felt inadequate, insecure and doubtful but God was so faithful to help me."

While working at Teen Challenge, Chevonne met and married Nathaniel "the second greatest gift I have received – the first being Jesus".

Chevonne, who knows how it feels to be physically adopted, says she is now spiritually adopted by God, who is her heavenly Father, whom she trusts.

"I have learnt that even though, as Christians, we face trials and challenges, none of these are greater than God. At the end of the day, He wins and through Him, I overcome too!"

She concludes with Romans 6, verse 4: "For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives."

# We don't wear signs

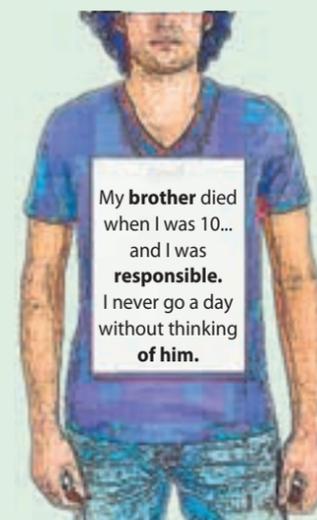
**A WOMAN** was driving in the traffic when she got stuck behind a very slow moving car. Just as she was getting annoyed, she saw a sign in the back window that said: *Learning stick [shift], sorry for any delay.*

Instantly she was more patient with the driver ahead.

It reminds me of another story I heard about a man on a train with his unruly kids, who were jumping around and causing mayhem until another passenger complained about the man's lack of parenting.

The distracted father responded: "I'm sorry, we're just coming back from their mother's funeral."

As the woman who posted the first story in her blog noted:



"We don't know what someone is going through. We don't wear signs that illustrate our personal struggles. You don't see signs taped to people's shirts that say, 'Going through a divorce,' or 'Lost a child,' or 'Feeling depressed,' or 'Diagnosed with cancer'."

"If we could read visually what those around us are going through we would definitely be nicer. But we shouldn't have to see signs and have reasons to treat strangers with kindness. We should do it anyway, whether we know what is going on or not. Whether they deserve it or not."

I think a good policy is to assume a person has good reason for doing something, rather than just jump in with judgmental criticism. As the expression goes: you can't criticise someone until you have walked a mile in their shoes.

Or, in the words of the Bible, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." (Philippians chapter 2, verses 3-4)

It is very difficult though to be patient when we don't understand why someone is doing / not doing something that we expect. That must be why God is so patient with us – He understands everything we are going through and all the impulses that motivate us.

May He give us eyes to see others as He does.

## What's the time in your house?

• From page 1

"It was a miracle in my eyes," Roy shares joyfully. His new-found faith did not magically make his troubles disappear though. "Not long after that, I broke my back and then my wife got breast cancer."

Many years later, his wife died after a double stroke.

After some years of being on his own, a retired missionary phoned Roy and asked him to come to Sydney for a few weeks. While there, Roy suffered another accident. He was walking on a footpath and fell into a maintenance pit with a broken lid. He already had four stainless steel bolts in his back from his last break. Because of his fall, Roy had to undergo another operation for pain management.

"I am grateful that God has kept me out of a wheelchair," he says.

Roy met and married his second wife at his church. He was thankful to have her by his side to help him as he went through this crisis.

"When I first found new life in Jesus Christ, I asked for the strength to stay off the wine and smokes and deliverance from a dirty mouth," Roy, now 71, remembers. "I emptied out the wine, crushed up the smokes and binned them and kept up the practice of reading the Bible. One verse that has been special to me is from Ephesians 4:29 which says, 'Let no corrupt language come out of your mouth.' Why? Because my body is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God is good, all the time."



# Pain gives him strength

Atticus Shaffer has spent nine years as one of the stars on the set of ABC's popular sitcom, *The Middle*, playing Patricia Heaton's youngest son, Brick. But fans of the baby-faced young man may not realise that he has had to overcome a serious medical condition to succeed.

Atticus revealed, in a PureFlix interview, that he has a painful genetic disorder that he has struggled with from birth, known as osteogenesis imperfecta or brittle bone disease.

This means that he frequently suffers from fractures and broken bones and has screws, rods and plates embedded throughout his legs and back.

"This is the exact way God intended me to be," the 19-year-old actor declares confidently to *The Gospel Herald*. "Having this disease is a minimal part of me – it does not define me. Absolutely nothing is impossible when you have God right there beside you and He is beside you all the time."

Atticus has always been open about his Christian faith and how he has come to know Jesus. He believes that it is important to be "strong and courageous and stand in one's faith" – even though that can be hard to do in the secular world of Hollywood.

Atticus grew up in a Christian home and was told all about Jesus as a child.

"My mom presented me with the Gospel [good news of Jesus'

death on the cross to pay for our sins]," Atticus remembers. "But she always left me the opportunity to learn and to grow in my relationship with God [on my own]. My mom has the same condition that I do and she's gone through a lot more than just that in her life. She has overcome so much and she is my role-model and hero."

Atticus says that it was through endless surgeries and intense pain that he learnt to trust God the most.

"I do know pain," he says, "And that's one of the things that I have learned having this disease: it's helped me to be more empathetic and be more compassionate towards others. You get placed in situations where you have to depend [solely] on God."

As a result of this, Atticus gave his life to the Lord when he was 15 years old and got baptised soon afterwards. "I really committed to Christianity [at this time]," he recalls. "I just felt, 'I need to know the Lord. I need to know where I stand. I need to pick a side.'"

Even when working in secular television, Atticus has remained



The cast of ABC's "The Middle" - Season Nine - "a heck of a ride". Edén Sher, Neil Flynn, Patricia Heaton, Charlie McDermott and Atticus Shaffer. (Photo: Michael Ansell, Getty Images)

true to his beliefs. "You are presented with things that you are not normally presented with and, especially in today's times, there's a lot more of it," he admits. "There are so many things you can be exposed to. I knew I needed to stand by the commitment I had made to God.

"I've never been a person to

Bible thump or to force anything on anyone ... But I do know that there is a difference between right and wrong and I do not have that line blurred."

On the show, Atticus shares that once he became a Christian and stood up for his beliefs "a lot of the other crew who were not open about their faith started to speak up and talk about it too. So we all came together and supported each other."

"In secular TV, it is risky," Atticus admits. "I have worked with people who, as soon as they find out that I am a Christian, treat me differently. But, that happens," he accepts philosophically. Atticus believes, as the Bible says, that followers of Jesus should be lights in dark places, and thinks that Hollywood is an excellent place to shine the goodness of God.

"I have never been a partier," he admits. "I have never been to any of the parties for the show. I would much rather stay at home, than go out and party and do things that other young people my age will do in this industry."

Atticus has credited *The Middle's* success to the moral foundation of the writers, cast and crew, and their ability to tell real-life stories in a family-friendly manner. "It was really sticking to [good] morals, and a lot of the storylines were based on things that the writers went through themselves," he says.

As someone who knows suffering, Atticus has a message of hope for others. "You know, life can really stink. There is suffering. There are so many things that can really affect you in life. How do you overcome that and what is the mindset that you have to have? It's equipping yourself with the Word of God [the Bible] and having a relationship with Him.

"It's also knowing that your strength is not your own. All the time, people think that they have to be strong but no, you don't. [When you become a Christian] your strength comes from outside of you and is placed in you and you lean on that strength. Learning to choose Christ over yourself is a life-long journey and I am no expert, I am still learning, but if I can reach at least one person for Christ, then that alone is a victory for me."

**"Life can really stink. There is suffering"**

## ARE OUR PRAYERS IMPOTENT?

BY JODY BENNETT

AFTER the recent school shooting in Santa Fe, Texas, Senator Ted Cruz tweeted, "Heidi and I are keeping all the students and faculty at Santa Fe High School in our prayers this morning, along with all first responders on the scene."



This sparked a vicious reaction on Twitter.

One person replied, "You're not even giving them your thoughts anymore? They've been downgraded to just prayers now?" Another tweeted, "If you're not going to work to improve this country, Ted, retire. We're tired of paying you in exchange for your useless prayers." Another tweeted a picture of two cats laying on a chair with the caption, "I NAMED MY CATS THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS BECAUSE THEY ARE USELESS."

Ouch!

I think the first thing to acknowledge is that in the midst of tragedy, especially death, we all feel helpless. Nothing brings us face to face with our own mortality and powerlessness than losing someone else. The shocking suddenness of death – that someone is here today and tomorrow is no more and never will be again, is terrifying.

Many people (even some Christians) think that our prayers should somehow give us power over death and sickness. That our prayers should act like a magic wand and wave our problems away – and if they don't then they are useless.

But prayer was never meant to be a means of controlling God – there is no formula you can

employ in prayer to get your way every time. Prayer is primarily an acknowledgement of our dependency on a sovereign God. It reminds us that we are small, that our perspective is limited, our resources are few, our world is imperfect and that, for Christians, our hope lies in future perfection, not immediate relief.

Prayer helps us express and work through our feelings, change our outlook from the present and earthly to the eternal and heavenly, and surrender our lives and expectations into the loving, all-powerful hands of God.

It is ultimately an act of faith – faith that there is more beyond what we witness and understand. Prayer is us stepping out into the unknown, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, in whom all that faith is centred and fulfilled.

The Bible assures us, in contrast to those tweets, that "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). So, if your prayers "aren't working", maybe that says more about you than prayer! ;) But even the prayers of the righteous may not be answered with a "yes" or in the time frame they expect or in the manner they expect.

For instance, many pray for healing and God chooses to heal their loved ones completely by taking them to heaven, rather than with temporary healing on earth. Or, as I did, you may pray for a spouse (or a child or a job) and God only chooses to answer that prayer years later – in His perfect time because He knew the growing you needed to do first. Or God may answer your prayer with a "no" because not everything we pray for is good for us.

Prayer changes us, not God; but through prayer He allows us to participate in what He is doing in

the world. That is why the Bible clearly tells us to call to God on behalf of those in need (cf. Acts 12:5; 1 Timothy 2:1).

And just think of the alternative. If you don't believe in any being greater than us humans, who is able to intervene in the affairs of men (even if He chooses not to sometimes) does that make suffering any easier? Isn't your anger and "independence" cold comfort? Isn't it a bit like cutting off your own nose to spite your face to choose to believe that we have no purpose, that life has no meaning and that there is nothing after death, just because God won't do what you want?

That would be an incredibly bleak reality to live in. Besides, millions can testify that God has often graciously answered their prayers, or comforted them in the midst of unanswered prayers, even if from the outside it looked like nothing changed.

The Bible is full of examples of answered prayer, that passage in James 5 gives the example of Elijah "He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops" (verse 17-18) and my life is full of examples of answered prayer too – healing, provision, direction, protection etc.

When I am frustrated because God seems deaf, or life seems unfair, I choose to believe with the Psalmist: "Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:23-26).

# Porn addict's search for freedom

James Jennings was only twelve years old when he became heavily addicted to pornography. For the next nine years of his life “I was a slave of it, whether it would be from the Internet or magazines. I was living for lust”.

On top of this, James struggled with deceit and video games. “I would play video games for 15-16 hours a day for about six years of my life,” he admits. “That’s all I did: play games. I had more joy being a video game character and worrying about the level-ups and the gear that my character had than my real life character.”

And through all this, James says he thought he was a Christian.

James grew up in the church and around 5-6 years of age, he said the sinner’s prayer on his grandmother’s step outside of her house.

“I remember for years after that, my hope of salvation was

in that prayer, in me accepting Jesus,” he says. “I would remember that spot. My hope was not in Christ. My solid rock was not Him. I was trusting in a frame that appeared to be sturdy but it was going to let me down in the end.”

Then, as James entered the early teen years, he began taking notice of the magazines in the cashier lines of grocery stores.

“[Pornography] was what drove me,” he confesses, “It

was what satisfied me. The incredible thing is that no matter how much you get, it will always leave you barren and empty.”

James was pulled out of middle school by his parents when he was caught lying about how he spent his time. Instead of doing schoolwork, James would play video games all day every day.

“When I was eighteen, my parents forced me to get my driver’s license because I did not even want to drive,” James shares sadly. “I wanted to sit at home, with that computer, playing games all day long. That was my god, my idol, and it went hand-in-hand with the Internet and pornography.”

James says that he looks back now and realises that he “was a fool. I was going to gain [the world] and lose my soul for all of eternity.”

James began to really hate the sin of pornography. “The shame and the guilt it caused in my life – it really made me miserable,” he recalls. “I would be

on my face, crying out to God, saying, ‘God, I will never do this again’. But I kept going right back to it. I was consumed. I was controlled by it.

“I was really striving to get free. I remember doing courses and getting Internet filters. When I was eighteen, I had a burden to put a testimony up because I had been free of pornography for thirty-something days. Then, I began falling back into the sin so I deleted it.”

**“IT IS [JESUS] WHO SETS YOU FREE, NOT YOUR OWN SELF”**



*This confronting painting by Stephen S. Sawyer is called Calvary and aims to illustrate that Jesus took our pain and addiction on Himself when He died on the cross. In the artist’s description he says, in part: “We serve ourselves at the cost of others until there is only one unselfish Person left who will intercede and sacrifice Himself to endure our private hell. ... Only God will share in the fullness of your sufferings and never forsake you.”*

*Copies of this painting and others like it are available at Stephen’s website at [www.art4god.com](http://www.art4god.com)*



Then, when James was in a relationship with a girl, he began to think, “If I ever marry this person, how will I ever live with myself, being married and still looking at pornography? I do not want to be in a situation like that.”

James began to receive false assurance from the church and other people around him that he was saved. But, deep down, he knew that he wasn’t and he knew that something in his life had to change.

“At the age of twenty-one, I was lost,” James relates. “I started going to a Bible study one night and started to have an interest in the Word of God. I started to talk to all the guys there about how we had to get free of pornography and masturbation. We had Safe Eyes, internet filters, and did 60 day courses but nothing was working.”

James went home after the Bible study and walked

into the living room where his family was watching a TV show that had supermodels on it. “I looked for one second, I saw a model and all these thoughts of lust flooded my mind,” James confesses. “I went back to my room and all these thoughts of lust overcame me; I could not take them captive. I was going to open up my browser to view pornography but instead, I went and checked my Facebook.”

Someone, who had been at the Bible Study that night, had sent James a message, praising him for all the positive things they had seen in his life. James realised that God had done nothing in his life, it was all a work of his own. “I had worked so hard to clean the outside of the cup, yet I had no new heart from God. I was not born again [spiritually renewed].”

That night, James cried out to God. He finally gave up all his idols and addictions to the Lord.

“Even though I did not realise it at the time, I was saved that night,” James says. “I had

freedom, real freedom, from pornography and masturbation. I was no longer a slave to it.”

Months later, James realised that he had not been saved at the age of six; he had been saved that very night as a twenty-one year old.

“To have the preciousness of Christ – to know that He became sin for me and that He suffered the wrath of God and that God allowed His only Son to die on the cross for my sins personally; that is just incredible, it is amazing,” James exclaims with a smile.

Later, James started up the website, Illbehonest.com, where people are free to openly share their testimonies and tell others about how much God has worked in their lives.

“For eighteen years of my life, I was totally hardened to the truth,” James admits. “I pursued freedom, but I did not pursue Christ. If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed, but it is the Son who sets you free, it is not your own self. So, pursue God with all of your heart, soul and mind; He is so worthy of it.”

# Have you Googled that?

BY JIM DENISON (ABRIDGED)

EACH December, Google releases the “Year In Search,” a video summarizing the Google searches shaping that given year. I recently watched “Year In Search 2017” and was reminded of the hardships of last year.

According to this video, the trending searches of 2017 included these questions:

- ◆ How far can North Korean missiles go?
- ◆ How much will the wall cost?
- ◆ How many refugees are there in the world?
- ◆ How do hurricanes form?
- ◆ How to help victims in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Houston, and Las Vegas?
- ◆ How to make a protest sign?
- ◆ How to run for office?
- ◆ How to make a difference?
- ◆ How to be a strong woman. (#MeToo)
- ◆ How to be a good parent.
- ◆ How to be fearless.



On any given year, it may be a different country, a new natural disaster, or a different variation of social injustice, but it’s the same problems painted with new dates, new faces, and new names.

Solomon was right in Ecclesiastes 1:9 when he lamented, “What has been will be again, what has done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”

**WHAT IS OUR CULTURE NOT SEARCHING FOR?**

Perhaps even more enlightening is what’s missing from the lists of top Google searches. In my admittedly highly unscientific study, I could not find a single list where the Bible or God was listed in the top 100. Mind you, pornographic content was listed four times in the top 100 but absolutely nothing religious.

Think about this: if Google processes roughly 40,000 searches every second, or 3.5 billion searches per day, and God isn’t even in the top 100 searches--Houston, we have a problem. Our culture is clearly searching for answers to life’s tough questions but doing so in ways that will not offer the true wisdom that only God provides.

**WHO SHOULD OUR CULTURE BE SEARCHING FOR?**

God is the only source for those seeking true wisdom and answers to life’s toughest questions. Solomon said it best: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

Who is God? He is our Creator (Genesis 1); our refuge (Psalm 46:1); our stronghold in trouble (Nahum 1:7); our deliverer (Psalm 18:2); our healer (Exodus 15:26); our provider (Philippians 4:19); our advocate (1 John 2:1-2); the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

Technology advances, presidential administrations change, new tragedies persist, yet our culture is still searching for the same answers. As Christians, our challenge should not be in finding the answers but instead helping our culture redefine the question. Our culture is Googling “how” questions when they should actually be seeking “who.”

Solomon concluded there was nothing new under the sun, so he anchored his faith in the One who reigns over the sun. When you put your trust in the One who is sovereign, in total control over all things, the One who is the answer to all of life’s questions, your life displays the only answer our culture truly needs: Jesus.



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## 'Your cancer has become a baby!'

Gospel recording artist, Blair Monique Walker, took to social media in May to announce the miraculous birth of her new baby boy, Noah Alexander.

While many parents might rightly regard the beauty of new life as a miracle, Blair had an even stronger reason for doing so.

Months earlier, Blair had been diagnosed with uterine cancer. Doctors told her that she would have to have a hysterectomy, which meant that she could never have another child. The surgery was scheduled.

According to *Breaking Christian News*, when the day arrived for her to visit her surgeon for a pre-operative check-up, she says something amazing happened.

The surgeon was looking at an ultrasound of Blair's uterus to see the size of the cancer, but he could not find any tumours. Instead, he saw something else.

"It looks like your God removed all of your tumours and left you with a baby," the doctor said.

When she announced Noah's birth, Blair stated: "Miracles do happen. I can say I have seen a couple in my lifetime.

"Nobody but God could have done something like this. I stand amazed. My heart is overwhelmed and I can only expect greater things from God. Thank you to everyone who prayed for a full-term complication-free pregnancy. Your prayers were heard."

Blair's husband, Terrance, had faith that God would heal his wife. He said that the birth of Noah has strengthened his faith even more. "I always knew that God could do it because He had done minor things for my first son.

"He had a hernia and I used to pray ... and it went away by itself ... It is all about just trusting God, because sometimes it might not happen how you think it should happen."

Blair adds, "[God] did this for us. I do not know why, I cannot tell you why He chose this situation but it is incredible to me."

The couple hopes their story encourages others to put their faith in Jesus and then trust God for miracles in their lives.



Baby Walker and (above) Blair Monique.

# Jazz singer acknowledges faith roots

Double Grammy award-winning Jazz singer and songwriter Gregory Porter was very influenced by his mother, Ruth, who was a preacher and brought up eight children on her own.

Gregory told the BBC series *Fern Britton Meets* that most of his lyrics are filled with Christian themes like love and the equality of all people in God's eyes. The equality theme is not surprising, given the hardship Gregory's family faced in his early years.

He was raised in poverty, with a mostly absent father. "I would be listening to Nat King Cole and imagining that he was my father," Gregory recalls sadly.

The Porters were called names, a burning cross was put on their front lawn, bottles of urine were thrown into the house, smashing windows, and his brother was shot twice "when some young racists were looking for someone black to hurt that night".

Bitterness and insecurity could have eaten Gregory up and destroyed his life. How did he become the loving and successful person he is today? Through his mother telling him, "You are valuable, you are worthy, and there is nobody above you." As a result, none of the insults really stuck. "That was fortifying, knowing that I was a child of God," Gregory recalls.

Gregory grew up in church and accepted Jesus as a young boy, being influenced by his mother's preaching and seeing the real need for "always going wherever the need was deepest, wherever the battle was."

But Gregory's journey into the world of music was not an easy one. He sang in church, but did not think of a career in music until he had a conversation with his mother on her deathbed.

"She had been diagnosed with breast cancer and had been sent home to be with her family," Gregory recalls. "She was connected up to the oxygen, the thing was cranked right up, but she still could not breathe."

Still, Ruth found the strength to tell her son that he should try and become a professional singer.

"It was something I had never even considered until then," Gregory admits. "I just could not see



Singer Gregory Porter in New York City to discuss his new album 'Nat 'King' Cole & Me' last December. (Photo Steve Zak Photography/WireImage)

how it could work."

Two days later, Ruth died, but her words proved powerful.

"When she passed, I was gone," Gregory confesses. "I did not sing for a long time, for almost a year. I went to be with my brother, to get some inspiration to get up in the morning. Then I remembered what she had said to me.

"I started going to jazz jam sessions, three times a week. That was just a way of getting out of this funk of pain over losing my mother."

However, Gregory spent years struggling to support his family as a jazz singer, not signing his first record deal until he was nearly 40. But he never lost

faith in his music or God.

When one of Gregory's albums, *Liquid Spirit*, won a Grammy award in 2014 for *Best Jazz Vocal Album*, he remembers the moment. "It's hard to describe a dream come true of a dream you didn't think was possible," he says. "I found myself on stage not fully sure how to conduct myself."

Gregory is often recognised for his trademark black cap and balaclava. While he does not go into the details of the facial scars it covers caused by injuries he suffered when he was younger, he admits that it has become his "signature look to rock".

Gregory learned to put his faith into practice from his mother, who set up her own church in the worst part of town, to reach drug addicts and prostitutes with God's love.

Gregory tells that on one occasion Ruth had seen a woman high on drugs running through a park, naked and screaming. She had stopped the car, told the kids to grab towels out of the boot, covered the lady, held her in her arms, stroked her head and calmed her down. She had spent hours with her, until the drugs wore off.

"At the time I thought, 'why does my mother have to be this kind of woman?'" Gregory says. "But now, I promise you, she was teaching without saying a word. So when I sing a song like, 'Take me to the alley', that experience in the park is what wrote that lyric. It was my mother's action that put that inside of me; seeing how to be selfless, giving, and Christ-like in a way."

Gregory's brother Dion continues his mother's ministry in a church named after her. As a result, there are fewer addicts and prostitutes in that area today.

His sister, Lawanda, adds: "When Gregory is up there singing, it often feels like that's my mother up there, preaching."

Gregory is married to Victoria and has a two-year-old son, Demyan.

## Atheist 'hit' by God - in a good way

Michael Ford was satisfied with the fact that he was an atheist and that the world had come about by the means of evolution until an encounter encouraged him to read the Bible.

Michael was raised in a house where he was taught "God exists and if you are good, then you will probably get something at the end of it".

But at around the age of fourteen, he sat on his bed, pulled the covers up over his head and said to himself, "God does not exist."

"I was not immediately struck down by a lightning bolt. So, from then on, I thought God was non-existent and it was very freeing," Michael recalls.

"Everything suddenly became open to me and I started looking for anything and everything that [pointed] to the premise that God did not exist."

Even though he had "no drive to read the Bible or to attend church" Michael still had doubts about his decision. He got into philosophy and read up on many great scientists. He was "searching and scrambling for truth" but "there was no real value to any of it."

Michael became so depressed at this point, that he began self-harming. He laboured over the question: "What is the reason for everything?"

"Regardless of my lack of faith, there was still something valuable about faith," he says. "There was still that thorn that said that there was something amiss ... I was still searching for the truth."

One day, an evangelical outreach was held by some people from another town at Michael's university campus. He sat with two of his friends mocking a card the Christians had given out that had the words, "I'll be Honest" on it.

As they were laughing, a girl came up, sat in on the conversation and asked what they had been talking about. Then, she began telling Michael and the others about Jesus.

After an hour, Michael's friends left and tried to pull him away with them but he wanted to keep talking to the girl.

"There was something different about this person, something real, something that really struck me about her," he remembers. "I could not put my finger on it."

They kept talking for another two hours and "it became very

clear that what she believed, she believed much more than anything that I believed. She had to have some kind of truth that I was just not privy to at all.

"What really struck me," Michael continues, "was that every single response that she gave me was essentially the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Good News of His coming and His dying and the reality of sin. Her argument was, essentially, that all that matters is Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

By the time they parted ways, Michael had "a real drive to read the Bible". But he was still "unwilling to accept that God could exist".

As he continued reading through the Scriptures and hearing the convicting stories of what Jesus had done for others, Michael learned that all he had to do was "just believe". He did not need to work himself up to be perfect because he had already sinned, he had already fallen short.

"It all started to make sense," he says. "I was sitting in my basement and I decided, 'Okay, I will pray'. And I just started talking to the Lord. I did not know who I was talking to at first. The first few times, it did not really seem like anything was going on ... but I prayed over and over again.

"Eventually, it started to feel like something

else was happening. I was no longer talking to my ceiling; I was being heard. Someone was listening, Someone was understanding."

Michael stocked shelves at night for a job and one morning, as he was driving home, he stopped at a stop sign and watched the sunrise. As he was marvelling at its beauty, he thought of Christ.

"Suddenly, I could not have told you at the time, but John 3:16 became real and it became about me," he recalls. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" became 'For God so loved Michael that He gave His only begotten Son, that if I were to believe on Him, I would not perish but have eternal life'. It just hit me as real; not just as an idea, but as a reality.

"I started to realise my sin. If Christ is real, if Christ died for me, how wretched am I, what have I done to deserve this? I just received a huge conviction. What could I have possibly been doing with my entire life that I could just insult the Creator of the universe? The reality of Christ, the reality of my sin, the brevity of life ... it all hit me at once, like a brick in the head.

"I just broke down. I was laughing and weeping at the same time. When I got home, I called out to Jesus, thanking Him for [saving me]. I was so overjoyed."

"As an atheist on campus, I had been yelling at all these believers and calling them fools when actually [I was the fool].

"When the scales fell off of my eyes, so much of God poured in. All these philosophies of men, all of these things that I had been dedicating myself to - computer games, tabletop games, silly things - were just wasting my time until, basically, I was dead, because there had been no point to life. It all hit me: just who the Lord is and what He has done through His perfect, completed work on Calvary. [I realised] just how much God has worked from the beginning of time to bring us back to Himself." •



# Science reinforces faith

**Don Batten interviews immunologist Dr Natalie Bennett, whose natural curiosity as a child, led to a career in science**

**“W**hile I had always been curious about how things worked, my passion for science came to the fore when I was eleven years old. My family often spent the school holidays camping at a friend’s farm in Gippsland. This particular summer, we were helping to butcher a sheep and I was allowed to examine the visceral organs. I was totally fascinated.

“I vividly recall ‘digging’ through the metres of intestines wondering what went on inside of them, holding the heart and wondering about how it worked and how blood clotting was happening, and being entranced by the spongy feel of the lungs.

“I decided then that I would be a scientist and learn all about how the body worked. In hindsight, Psalm 139:14, perfectly sums up how I felt: ‘I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.’

“A career in science was not a typical choice for a girl in the 1970s but I was blessed to have parents who encouraged me to follow my dreams.”

Growing up, Natalie’s Christian father liked to discuss and analyse the Bible, and firmly believed that God said what He meant and meant what He said. Natalie says, “I have always had this core belief that the Word [Bible] is right and therefore whatever does not agree with the Word is not right. When I was twelve years old, I realised that I myself had to respond personally to Jesus, so that is really when I became a Christian.”

**Science-faith struggles?**  
I asked Dr Bennett if she had ever had any struggles over science and her faith.

“Not really,” she responds. “Everything I have ever learned about science has reinforced my faith in the true God of the Bible. While there were times when I could not reconcile faith and ‘science’ (e.g. the ‘proven’ old age of the earth), I always assumed that the Bible was right and that the science was somehow based on incorrect assumptions, or simply that they did not yet have enough information to come to the correct conclusion.

“Reading Dr John Ashton’s book, *In Six Days: Why 50 scientists choose to believe in Creation*, really encouraged me because I realised that many scientists do not subscribe to the prevailing evolutionary worldview and yet they had successful careers in science.

“Then I discovered *Creation*



Natalie and her son Matthew on a family holiday to the Grand Canyon in December 2014.

*Ministries*, which has helped me to clarify what I believe about Creation versus evolution and has provided me with a wealth of information about how to defend my belief in the reliability of God’s Word.”

**Research**

Natalie’s doctoral thesis focused on the development of T lymphocytes – a type of cell that is crucial for the effective function of the immune system in fighting disease. The importance of these cells is highlighted in AIDS patients where the virus kills T cells; and the patient, without treatment, will die from infections or diseases that are normally easily overcome by a healthy immune system.

“The development of T cells is a highly complex, step-wise process that includes multiple check-points, where particular cell interactions must occur and specific genes must be turned on or off,” Dr Bennett explains. “It involves the selection of T cells that can recognise the difference between self and non-self, but respond only to non-self.

“In this way, the immune system attacks only foreign invaders, such as microbes that can cause disease, but does not attack our own body cells. T cells that do not meet the selection requirements must be destroyed, otherwise they can cause debilitating, and even fatal, autoimmune diseases.

“Given the complexity of the development process, which involves multiple extremely complex enzyme systems working together, and the importance of getting it right for the health and survival of the individual, it is inconceivable that the immune system could evolve incrementally over time – a functional immune system appears to be ‘irreducibly complex.’ (That is, all components must be present and working together for the system to work effectively, so that the immune system could not

develop by small steps from no function to function).

**Family life**

Dr Bennett shares how “research is a very demanding occupation, often requiring long hours in the lab, working nights and on weekends. It is not very family-friendly. When my son Matthew was born, I withdrew from research to spend as much time as possible with him. To satisfy my passion for science, I went into teaching, which tends to involve more regular work hours, so that I could help interested students gain an appreciation of how wonderfully we are created. I sometimes miss working in the lab, but have no regrets about trading it for time with my family.

“I currently teach basic anatomy and physiology to allied health students. Generally, this does not involve discussing origins at all – evolution is not relevant to these studies. Most of my students are awed by the wonderful complexity of the human body and they can see the rather obvious design without much help from me. Some will ask about how the complex functional integration of organ systems could evolve, and this gives me the opportunity to talk about Creation and encourage their questions – stimulating their critical thinking and inquisitiveness. That is what makes science really interesting for students.”

**Does evolution help science?**

“I think that the teaching of the theory of evolution has undermined the scientific method. The classic scientific method is operational – it involves observation of some aspect of the natural world, the formation of a hypothesis about that observation, using that hypothesis to make predictions and then experimentation to test those predications.

“The experimental results may support the hypothesis or result in modification of the hypothesis. This process is continually repeated until the hypothesis is sufficiently supported to become a theory that allows us to explain our observations. This theory must also be falsifiable –

meaning that an experiment or discovery could disprove the theory.

“The scientific method is not appropriate for biological evolution. Evolution is not observable within our timeframe; it is an alleged historical event.

“Evolution [microbes-to-man-kind] cannot be confirmed by experimental investigation but depends on untestable assumptions. Evolutionists interpret facts to fit a hypothesis that resists modification, despite evidence to the contrary, i.e. it is clearly not falsifiable in practice for those who believe it.

“Evolution is accepted as a theory despite being unable to adequately explain many observations in the natural world, such as the origin of the immune system that I studied. Evolution makes a mockery of the scientific method, but students are encouraged to accept it as an unassailable fact. This is not good science.”

*Don Batten worked as a research scientist and consultant plant physiologist and is now the Managing Director of Creation Ministries International in Brisbane, Australia. For more: creation.com/batten.*

**Believe it or not**

## Early Earth findings amaze geologists

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

**CONDITIONS** on the early earth were very similar to those today, say secular geologists. They have been surprised by new research on zircon crystals—some ‘dated’ to over 4 billion years old, only 500 million years after the earth formed, the ‘Hadean Eon’ on the evolutionary timescale.

The results indicate that the world must have originally had oceans and continental land just as it does today.



This is a huge backflip in thinking by orthodox, uniformitarian geologists, who for decades said that the early earth was utterly hostile to life, being covered by a glowing sea of molten rock. Not so, they now say.

Zircons are tiny crystals found in sandstone that derive from volcanic rocks. Oxygen isotope comparisons of Hadean and Icelandic zircons have found that copious amounts of water were present as oceans on the early earth, and that temperatures seem to have been much cooler than expected. The picture emerging is getting ever closer to the Bible’s description. 2 Peter 3:5 indicates that the earth “was formed out of water and through water”, and Genesis 1:2 implies that it was covered in water right at the start (dry land emerged just days later, v. 9).

• Early Earth less hellish than previously thought, news.vanderbilt.edu, 15 September 2014.

• Iceland is not a magmatic analog for the Hadean: Evidence from the zircon record, Earth and Planetary Science Letters 405(1):85–97, 1 November 2014 | doi:10.1016/j.epsl.2014.08.015.

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# Building Better Marriages

## LEARNING TO LIVE FREE OF SHAME

BY ROB FURLONG

**U.S. HUMORIST**, Garrison Keillor was once asked in an interview what the most important thing in the world was. Keillor responded,

*"To lead an honest life. To be able to walk anywhere without fear, without self-consciousness, and without worry that your lies will be discovered."*

It is a powerful observation because it explains why many marriages (and relationships) struggle.

They struggle because the people concerned live with the fear that they will be found out for who they really are and will no longer be loved.

Another word for this is *shame*.

What is shame?

Shame is the feeling of humilia-

tion you experience when you have become the object of derision or contempt by others.

I remember this feeling well when as a self-conscious 14 year old I was mocked and humiliated by another boy in front of our whole class.

But far and away the most common form of shame we experience is the humiliation we feel when we have been disobedient or done what we always thought was unthinkable.

The roots of shame are found in the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God in the Garden of Eden and which is recorded in Genesis 3.

Instead of becoming "enlightened spiritually" they are plunged into spiritual darkness when they eat the fruit and attempt to hide their failure from each other by covering themselves with fig leaves before disappearing into the bushes in a futile attempt to conceal themselves from God.

Shame *always* drives us to hide ourselves in order to prevent people from seeing who we really are.

Because if people know what we

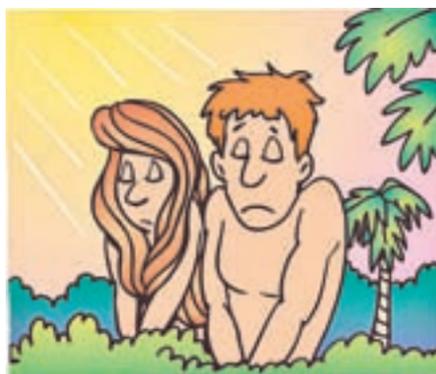
are really like they may not like us and we are not equipped to handle that kind of rejection.

Author and counselor, Larry Crabb, spoke of the impact of his shame on his relationship with his wife:

*"Like every man, I am silent just like Adam was silent. Sometimes I stand dumb-founded in the face of my confusion. When my wife asks me to share even the smallest part of myself, I occasionally bristle. When she cries, I may become angry with her. Her tears frighten me, because I don't know what to do with them. When she tells me I have done something wrong, I defend myself to the bitter end. If she finds fault with me, I find ten things wrong with her. I use words, I speak, but I use words to destroy relationship – as the serpent did in the garden.*

*Yet if my wife were able to scratch beneath the surface of my anger, she would find that I am ashamed of what is inside of me. What if I share my most intimate thoughts, dreams, and doubts – and she rejects me? Recall my story. I am a man who feels like an imposter. I already assume that I have nothing to offer. It is better, I wrongly think, to hide behind my silence.*

If a woman or a man never deals with their shame they will go through



life as an emotional cripple, living with the constant fear of being found out and forever trying to project an image about themselves that is false.

There are two great gifts that I have experienced in marriage that builds a relationship of deep trust and intimacy.

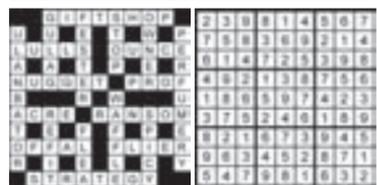
The first is the gift I have given my wife, albeit imperfectly, of sharing my deepest hurts, insecurities, hopes, fears and dreams.

The second is the gift I have received from her – her unconditional, non-judgemental and accepting love of me.

With these two gifts, which we have reciprocated to each other, we have forged a lifetime of growing intimacy.

And there is still a greater gift – the grace and forgiveness of a loving Father God Who takes *all* our shame away through His Son, Jesus.

There is no need then, to hide from each other or from God!



## How can I become a Christian?

**Anyone can gain the eternal life offered though Jesus Christ**

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

**OUR PROBLEM:** **Separation from God**  
"Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect" (Romans 3:23)

**ADMIT**

**GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION:** **Jesus died on the cross**  
"God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)

**BELIEVE**

**OUR RESPONSE:** **Trust Jesus by receiving Him**  
"To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12)

**COMMIT**

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

**AS A NEXT STEP:**

**If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box**



I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

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

**If you have NOT prayed the prayer at this stage, tick this box**



I would like to think about this.

Please send me:

- More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.
- I have a problem (see attached letter)

*\* Please tick and write clearly \**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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

Challenge Literature Fellowship PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985 / Fax (08) 9453 3006 or email info@challengenews.org

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## Lessons from a golfer - Pt 2



BY PETER BRAIN

**LET** me share more of my 18 thoughts on golf and life – one for each hole, in the hope that they might help you.

**4.** Have you ever played with someone who hits the green in regulation figures **but still isn't happy?** "If I had hit it a bit harder ..." Makes you mad doesn't it? Especially when you are putting for an eight! Some people are very hard to please. In fact all of us at some point in our lives tend to be like this. Especially towards God. Remember there are two ways to look at a glass of water – half full or half empty! The way we see it will determine how happy we are, how happy others will be around us and how much we enjoy God.

*Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 1 Timothy 6:6-8*

**5.** Imagine scoring a hole-in-one when you were playing **by yourself!** Nobody to enjoy the excitement with. And would your mates believe you when you told them? For me the company is as important as the golf. How good God is to give us friends and families with which to share our joys and sorrows.

*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Ecclesiastes 4:9-11*

**6.** I have played a couple of rounds of 'ambrose'. It certainly makes putting easier since you can **'go to school'** on the putts of the others. There is a lot to learn in life. The example of a good friend is priceless and we are wise to follow the good examples and avoid the habits of others.

*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1*

**7.** My great aim is to **play a par round**. I did it once on the front nine but was six over on the back nine. That was my best ever. Now it is a great day to break 40 for nine. Par is that standard all golfers aim for. My dictionary tells me "it is the number of strokes a scratch player should require." But we all know that no one, not even the best professional, has always played a par round or parred every hole they have played. Life is like that, isn't it? If we are honest we hardly ever live up to our own standards, not to mention God's. It is awesome to think that God marks our score card on our thoughts, words and actions.

*For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. Ecclesiastes 12:14*

• TO BE CONTINUED

## Ask Y

**Peter Meadows answers your questions about God.**

**Why is there so much suffering if God is all-powerful?**



FOR a start, we can't point the finger at God for 'everything'. For example, God doesn't cause wars or stir up hatred. And it is hardly God's fault that so much human suffering is allowed to continue. After all, the world spends \$780 billion a year on its military. Yet a mere \$8 billion could end world hunger.

Meanwhile we know how to put up buildings that can withstand an earthquake. And how to give an early warning of a tsunami. But often, for economic reasons, we don't put this God-given knowledge to work.

And millions of us fail to eat our veggies, fight the flab or control what reaches our intestines to the degree that the health that ought to be ours isn't. And then we look to God to sort out the mess we created.

Of course there's much more to it than that. Recently I heard of someone who 'gave up on God' because their brother drowned when he was nine. It left me asking myself if they expected God to make sure no one aged nine, anywhere, ever died. Because that unrealistic expectation was at the heart of what they were blaming God for.

Of course, an all powerful God could stop everyone, including you and me, from hurting anyone. But to do that He'd either have to make us robots, with no choice of our own; or snuff us out at the first sign of trouble – which would see the end of us for sure.

Which leaves us with the 'natural' disasters – that can take lives in their tens of thousands. The Bible's opening pages paint a picture of humanity in a beautiful garden in the midst of the whole of creation. With God declaring everything to be "good." That is the way God made things and intended them to be—for ever.

In such a world, nature would never misbehave and people would live the same way—with no grab and greed, no might is right, no me at the expense of you. But the humans chose to behave as though they were God and rebellion came into the world.

With a heart-tearing lurch, the whole of creation shook and splintered. Everything became spoilt—from human behavior to the balance of the environment. And it has remained that way ever since.

Will it stay that way? No. God promises there will one day be an end to it all. That we can look forward to a new heaven and earth, where there is no pain or sorrow. Where justice will rule. It is what He sent Jesus to make possible through His death on the cross. And what we can be part of even now if we choose to follow Him.

# PASSION TO DEFY HER PAST



**G**abrielle Douglas, fondly known as Gabby, is an American artistic gymnast who rose to stardom at the 2012 London Olympics, where she was the first African-American in Olympic history to become the individual all-around champion and the first U.S. gymnast to win gold in both individual all-around and team competitions during the same Olympics.

As a public figure, Gabby's successes shot her to fame, however, the humble 22-year-old refuses to take all the credit for herself. "God has given me this amazing talent, so I'm going to go out [there] and glorify His name," she states boldly.

That talent was forged in some very difficult circumstances, though.

When Gabby, the youngest of four, was born, she was very sickly and could not keep food down. At a few months old, she was diagnosed with a life-threatening blood disease. Her mother, Natalie, could not afford a doctor or medicine and knew that she only had one option.

"I would stay up all night praying [for her]," Natalie recalls.

God listened to this mother's heartfelt prayers and miraculously, Gabby started to gain weight and soon became a healthy, happy baby.

However, the family struggled financially as they suffered from extreme poverty. Up until Gabby was five, they all lived in a small van.

"I was very young so I do not remember [all the details]," Gabby says. "But we would eat on the floor off napkins."

When Gabby's father walked out on them, the family had to move into their grandmother's home until they could find a place of their own.

Knowing that the road ahead would not be an easy one, Natalie made sure that prayer and Bible study was a priority in her children's lives.

This sure foundation has kept Gabby on track during her most dif-

ficult times, and caused her to accept Jesus into her heart when she was young. "Faith plays a very big role in my life. I do not know where I would be without it today," she says.

As a child, Gabby found her passion in gymnastics, starting when she was just six. However, it was expensive and Natalie could not afford all of her children's pursuits. In an act of selflessness and generosity, Gabby's two older sisters decided to give up their activities so Gabby could pursue her dreams, one of which was heading to the Olympics.

When she was 14, Gabby moved to Iowa to train full-time with her coach, Liang Chow. She took her training seriously, spending six days a week in the gym. Chow, who had coached previous Olympic gold medallists, transformed Gabby from an average member of the national team to a top contender.

During this time, Gabby began to attract more and more attention as she competed at various national competitions. She was particularly skilled on the uneven bars and her ability to gain extraordinary height in the air when releasing from the apparatus earned her the label "The Flying Squirrel".

Eventually, Gabby's life-long dream of competing in the Olympics came true. However, "I got to a really dark place where I almost wanted to quit, right before the [2012] Olympic Games". But, with encouragement streaming in from her friends and family, Gabby's determination rallied.

"I had to rely on my faith the most. I went to the gym and said, 'OK, if I'm going to the Olympics, I'm going to do it big.' I prayed and meditated on Bible passages. I went back to the gym and my coach said he saw this fire in my eyes," she explains.

During the London Olympics,

Gabby's exceptional talent was on full display when, at the age of 16, she walked away with two gold medals and the satisfaction of knowing that she was the fourth USA Olympic all-around champion in history to win the title.

"It was just an amazing feeling," she gushes. "I just told myself, 'Believe, don't fear, believe.'"

Gabby also took part in the 2016 Rio Olympics, where she was a part of the final five participants. However, she was pipped in the final round, by teammate Simone Biles.

Gabby refused to let this get her down, though. "I'm not disappointed at all," she said in an interview at the time. "I have no regrets." She still managed to land the title of the AT&T American Cup all-around champion that year.

Gabby then decided to take a break from sport and focus more on family life and her walk with God.

Aside from gymnastics, she has several other accomplishments.

In 2012 she released an inspirational memoir, *In Grace, Gold, and Glory: My Leap of Faith*, in which she reveals that she can also speak and write Hebrew, and in 2014 she did all her own stunts in the movie they made from it, *The Gabby Douglas Story*, which aired on Lifetime, starring Imani Hakim as the young celebrity. Gabby also acquired her own reality television series, *Douglas Family Gold*, which premiered on May 25, 2016.

In 2017, she was selected as one of the judges for the Miss America pageant.

Sadly, that same year Gabby went public, along with others, about having been sexually abused as a teenager by USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar.

"You know, God has a plan for me, and I am going to follow in His

## "BELIEVE, DON'T FEAR, BELIEVE"



**ABOVE:** Gold medal gymnast Gabby Douglas put on a disguise to go undercover and discover gifted gymnasts and coaches for an episode of *Undercover Boss: Celebrity Edition* last September, for CBS Television Network. (Photo Mark Hill/CBS via Getty Images)



Former Gymnast Gabby Douglas attends the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation's 28th Annual 'A Time For Heroes' Family Festival at Smashbox Studios last October in Culver City, California. (Photo Paul Archuleta/FilmMagic)

footsteps and just rejoice and be happy," the brave gold-medallist champion says.

"I love sharing my story and I love sharing about my faith," she continues. "I want to be a blessing to others. I want people [to know] that even though they may be going

through difficulties and phases and even though [life] is hard sometimes, anything is possible if you set your mind to it."

Her motto could be the text from Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." ●

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