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SOON Magazine — helping to make sense of life

Where now?

WHERE ARE WE GOING IN 2000?

Are you excited? Or afraid? As Year 2000 arrives, what are you thinking? Will we enter a time of hope and new things? Or more days of trouble? How many computers will break down because of the 'millennium bug'? Could Jesus return to earth and end the world? Or will Dec. 31 be the biggest party there has ever been, with people drinking record amounts of alcohol? Probably few will remember that the real reason for Year 2000 is the birth of Jesus (Isa Masih).

LOOKING BACK

We can look back at the last 100 years. No other century has seen so many changes: cars, aeroplanes, space travel, electricity, telephones, computers. Yet it has been called the 'century of blood'. More people have died in war or become refugees than at any other time. We spend \$780 billion every year on guns, bombs and other weapons. Children are forced to become prostitutes. Drugs, poverty, and sicknesses such as AIDS, TB and malaria, are killing millions each year. We are spoiling our world by pollution. We use huge amounts

of fossil fuels: coal, gas and oil. People who want to get rich quickly are destroying many forests. These things cause global warming with unusual types of weather and bad floods.

WHAT IS WRONG?

Although people have been clever, is there something very wrong in our lives? All that we have been given, we use wrongly. It seems there is something bad, a force of evil, inside each of us.

How can we escape? How can we live in a difficult world? Recently some men murdered the husband and two young sons of Gladys Staines in India. Her words went round the world on radio and TV news: "I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future." She can only say this because she knows God as her friend.

Continued over...

"I am a light and have come into the world. Anyone who believes in me will not be in the darkness." **Jesus**

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IS ANYWHERE SAFE?

We can only find the safety we need by putting our lives into God's hands. Yes, one day Jesus will return, and bring both punishment and healing to this world. But the Bible says he will come "at a time you do not expect". In the year 1000, many people went to the top of mountains, believing that Jesus would return that day. Others have done the same thing more recently. Don't be tricked! No one can know when it will happen. The only way for us to be ready for Jesus is to find him—and allow him to give us a new life. Then we can know peace and a real reason for living.

Words for English learners

- millennium bug:** some computers are set up wrong and will be confused by the 2000 date
- record amounts:** more than ever before
- century:** a period of 100 years
- billion:** one thousand million
- poverty:** being very poor
- pollution:** allowing dangerous substances into the air, ground or water
- fossil fuels:** oil, gas and coal taken from under the ground
- global warming:** the world is becoming more hot, making changes in weather and life



Shot in the chest

SOON reader *Clement Tangnak* is a policeman in Papua New Guinea

I opened the door of our police van. Before my foot reached the ground, an arrow hit me in the chest.

We were travelling back from the Pogera Gold Mine in our Toyota van. As we went round a bend we saw some logs of wood in the road. Our driver stopped. We did not know there was an **ambush** only a few metres away.

My commander gave the order to get out of the van. It was then the arrow hit me. After escaping from the ambush we drove for thirty minutes to a hospital. The arrow was still in my chest — I thought I was going to die!

At the hospital I had an operation to remove the arrow. Later they told me that arrow had gone right into my chest, but my life was **spared**.

NEW LIFE

I did not know then that it was God who had spared my life. But on 19 August 1998 I asked God to forgive my wrongdoing and I received Jesus Christ into my life. He showed me how much he loved me — because even before I knew him, he was looking after me.

In a letter in the Bible, a man called Paul wrote this, "God showed his love for us in this way: Christ died to save us while we were still bad people". God sent Jesus Christ into the world to die instead of us, to pay for our wrongdoing. He did this because he loves us and wants us to know him in our lives.

Words for English learners

- ambush:** a surprise attack on someone from a hiding place
- spared:** saved from something bad

Alone with a lion

John Nyambe is in prison in Zambia

GARDEN BEAST

The lion **prowled** around the garden. Others ran away and hid up a high tower. We were alone, just my sister and me (only eight and ten years old) with the lion. At first we were not afraid — we thought it was our dog! But there it was, the animal we all fear. Then, for no reason, it went away. We were safe.

I knew it was God who had saved us. My family were Christians, living in a village near the Angolan border. I had learnt about God's love and care from the time I was born. Now I knew for myself that God looks after us.

Then I became ill. Something was wrong in my stomach. For six months I could not go to school. The doctors at the hospital could not help me, so some members of my family took me to people who believed that bad spirits would help me. But I would not join the people. I was told, "If you do not join, you will be worse than you were before. Bad spirits will trouble you." I asked God to help me and to keep me from harm, and he healed me. He was teaching me to trust him, and here I am today never troubled by bad spirits.

DEATH ROW

After I left school I joined the army. I did many bad things and never spoke to God or went to a church. Instead, my "gods" were women and strong drink. I needed so much money for this life I began to steal. One day I stole from **emerald traffickers** and killed them. When the police arrested me, I knew I would die for my crimes. I was put on **death row** in the **maximum security prison**.

Suddenly I understood what was missing in my life. God had saved me twice from death when I was young but I had been running away from him. I asked God to **forgive** me for all the terrible things I had done. For 17 years I was on death row — but I knew God's peace in my life even though I suffered many **tortures**.

But God did more than that. He helped me to make death-row a better place. It was so dark and terrible. Prisoners had no rights as human beings and we did not even have freedom to meet together to worship God. I worked for **human rights** for the prisoners. We began to worship God in the prison. I led the group and helped all



the prisoners by speaking up for their rights. Now death row is peaceful and it is not such a bad place to live as before.

My sentence has been changed to 35 years. I have only four years left now and I hope soon to be outside prison as a new person. I thank God for his kindness. When I ran away from him he showed me I must ask his forgiveness. Now he has used me in the prison to help others.

Editor's comment

Sometimes we say, "Living in a garage does not change you into a car." *John was born into a Christian family but he still needed to know God for himself. When he asked God to forgive him, then his life began to change. He realised that he needed to know Jesus Christ in his life, then God used him to help other people.*

Death row in that Zambian prison is a better place to be — because of what God helped John to do. Even on death row, John knew God's peace in his life and he was able to share it with others. God can help you too, even if your life is very difficult.

Words for English learners

- prowled:** moved quietly so as not to be seen or heard
- emerald:** bright-green gem stones of high value used in jewelry
- trafficker:** person who buys and sells goods against the law.
- death row:** the part of a prison for those who are to die
- maximum security prison:** prison with extra guards and locked gates for people who have done very bad things.
- forgive(ness):** to put a person's wrong into the past so people can be friends again
- torture:** great pain given to one person by another to make them suffer
- human rights:** the proper way to treat people

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