

# InterSections

Faithfulness fellowship  
decisions challenges Choices  
Reflections

February 2023 An Australian journal for Christian encounter and encouragement.



## Editorial

Welcome to a special issue of *InterSections* written largely by Christian young adults.

For them, as for many others, the Christian life is sometimes a lonely path, with many hurdles along the way. This should not surprise us (Jesus promised as much). But we can draw encouragement and inspiration from those who ran before us, as well as those running alongside us (Hebrews 12:1).

In that spirit, this issue reflects on the realities of living as a young Christian, written from the perspective of young Christians. In our *Feature*, Johnathon Atchley offers a Christian perspective on TikTok and how best to interact with it. In our *Food for Thought*, Dale Christensen explores how dating apps have changed the relationship landscape facing young believers and provides an insight into what the church and individuals should do. For our *Review*, we offer an appraisal of three Christian podcasts, and a number of Bible apps for personal reading and study. Our *ChurchScene* article brings us all the way to the Baxter Institute in Honduras, giving firsthand insight into the evangelistic spirit of our Latin American brothers and sisters.

Finally, we asked five young Christians to reflect on the challenges they have faced, and on what has kept them going in their walks of faith. Beliza Patricia, a Christian from Brazil, shares her reflections for this issue's *International Letter*. Adelphie Stokes, Micah Kirkpatrick, Ashlee Watt, and Sean Kelly also share their thoughts in our *Interview* section. We hope you are encouraged by the witness of these faithful brothers and sisters as we are.

Dale Christensen and Joy Tabalujan - Guest Editors.

## Church Scene

### *Embracing God's Global Family at the Baxter Institute*



Despite travelling 14,410 kilometres from Melbourne, I found a new home away from home in the little country of Honduras.

After finishing my university studies in June 2022, I set off on a seven-month, mostly solo, adventure to explore Europe and South America. One of my goals was to meet with Christian brothers and sisters of languages and cultures different to my own. For the first portion of my trip, this involved visiting different congregations on Sundays and reconnecting with existing Christian friends.

But after meeting Steve and Dianna Teel online through a mutual friend (thank you Harold Shank!), my flight path was redirected to Central America – specifically, the Baxter Institute in Tegucigalpa, Honduras ([baxterinstitute.edu](http://baxterinstitute.edu)).

Joy Tabalujan

Where is Honduras, you might ask? I asked that same question before my trip. Here's what Google said: Honduras is located in Central America; it has a population of over 10 million people; and its flag is white and turquoise with five stars and two stripes. It's safe to say that I knew very little about Honduras and Baxter before venturing to the other side of the world.

I soon learnt that Baxter is a Christian educational institution, purposed with equipping students to become missionaries, preachers, and leaders among Churches of Christ throughout the Spanish-speaking world. It was established originally in Mexico in 1964 before relocating to Honduras in 1978. Baxter achieves its mission through three programs: a four-year residential training and academic program; a three-year weekend school program; and a one-year correspondence course.

### ChurchScene ①

Embracing God's Global Family at the Baxter Institute

### Feature ③

Christianity and TikTok

### Food for Thought ④

Changes in the Dating and Relationship Landscape

### News ⑤

- KlesisEquip Courses
- Young Women's Prayer Group
- Camp Challenge

### Media Review ⑥

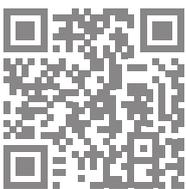
Podcasts & Apps

### International Letter ⑦

Reflections on Challenges

### Interview ⑧

Adelphie Stokes, Micah Kirkpatrick, Ashlee Watt, and Sean Kelly





In the four-year program, student classroom learning is supplemented with weekend church ministry assignments where students serve at a local congregation. Their theological studies and practical experiences culminate in a final six-month evangelistic campaign with a congregation in Central or South America.

Since 1964, 700 students have graduated from the four-year program, 500 from the three-year weekend school, and 10,000 from the one-year correspondence course. Currently, Baxter graduates serve in congregations all over North and South America.

The Baxter Institute also supports a medical clinic known as the James Moody Adams Clinic. The clinic serves an average of 12,000 patients every year, providing both medical and dental services. Additionally, over 700 prosthetic legs have been made and donated over the last seven years. The clinic also oversees a nutrition program which helps families with malnourished children. Mothers in this program attend vocational training classes, equipping them to support their families.

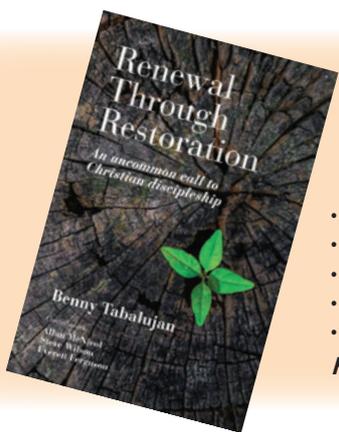
While at Baxter, I met students from Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela. I met accountants, IT specialists, university students, engineers, teachers, marketing gurus, a former TV reporter – the list goes on! And all these people left their families, friends, homes, and careers because of their heart for God and his Kingdom.

For example, at 23 years old, Luis was the youngest Baxter graduate in 2022. As a Honduran, Luis grew up in a local children's home, *Jovenes en Camino*, where he learnt about God through daily devotionals and worship on Sundays. The home was established by Christians and individuals associated with Baxter in 2004, and is presently run by Baxter graduates. In contrast, Victor is the oldest student at Baxter. At 63 years of age, Victor had a long career as a TV reporter in Costa Rica before coming to Honduras to study.

The backgrounds of Luis and Victor could not be more different – one started at Baxter as a young, fresh teenager, while the other started as an older, seasoned professional. Yet, their stories and ultimate landing place are the same because of their shared desire to study God's Word and do his work. Victor and Luis were only two of the 62 students from 12 countries that were at Baxter in 2022.

Ultimately, stopping by Baxter was a pleasant surprise. I found a new family I never knew I had – on the other side of the world. That's what is special about God's family. I developed a closeness with people who were complete strangers by the world's standards, but loving brothers and sisters in Christ. So if you ever find yourself in another town, another city, or even another country, reach out to fellow Christians. You never know what – or who – you might find. ◇

*Joy Tabalujan is part of Belmore Road Church of Christ in Melbourne. joy.tabalujan98@gmail.com*



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- Nathan Wilson, youth leader: "Read it if you grew up among Churches of Christ and are seeking to understand why you should stay."

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# Feature Christianity and TikTok

Johnathon Atchley

TikTok is taking the world by storm. In fact, it was recently declared the world's most downloaded app for the third year in a row, with teens globally using it for an average of 95 minutes a day.<sup>1</sup> Because of its unbridled influence (and its uncomfortably close relationship with the Chinese Communist Party),<sup>2</sup> several world governments – including Russia and India – have banned its use, with the USA possibly to follow suit.

People around the world are thinking and talking about TikTok. But what might a *Christian* perspective on TikTok be, and what would a wise and godly use of the app – if that's possible – look like?

Let's start with the basics. If you were to jump onto TikTok's *For You* page right now, what might you expect to see?

- A blooper reel where the actor playing Wednesday Addams breaks character;
- A snapshot of an illusionist turning Big Ben into a novelty wristwatch; or
- A video of a teen performing a dance she choreographed to her favourite song.

These short music videos, comedy skits, and mini-competitions are the bread and butter of TikTok. Like any part of the internet, they can contain strong language or sexual themes – though nudity and violence are prohibited. Yet TikTok mostly remains an online community where people can be introduced to the next viral video or fresh meme. Pretty standard stuff.

However, if you were to go looking for specifically 'Christian' content, it's fair to say you quickly encounter a mixed bag. Next to what some may consider to be top-notch contributions from preachers, comedians, and musicians are controversial fitness gurus and agnostic teachers who claim religious credentials. Arguably, while the former provoke spiritual reflection, the latter muddy the waters of Christian thought.

Consider the example of one of the most popular Christian-themed videos on TikTok: 'What's the hierarchy of angels?' by *@arlanfromnarnia* with 4.6 million views at the time of writing this.<sup>3</sup> He tells us of the three ranking orders of angels and their accompanying subtypes: seraphim, dominions, thrones, etc. You may be surprised by this information, because it wasn't drawn from the Bible, but from the non-canonical book of 1 Enoch, the 6th century mystic Pseudo-Dionysius, and a Wikipedia article. This is just one example of the kinds of sketchy theology you'll find on TikTok. It's no easy task separating the good from all the bad.

Obviously this issue is not unique to TikTok but widespread across the internet. But the nature of social media complicates things. Journalist Jess McHugh notes how social media effectively shoves 'any complex philosophy... through a meat grinder, with the prettiest bits plucked out to slap on to an Instagram caption.'<sup>4</sup> If you're looking for a balanced spiritual diet, short TikTok videos are generally not the place to find it.

Perhaps the biggest concern with TikTok is its purpose. Like all social media, TikTok's chief aim is to consume your attention. The more engagement the app gets, the more successful it is – and TikTok is exceptionally engaging. A big reason for that is the algorithm that they have developed. It's been said to be so adept at identifying the user's tastes that even TikTok itself is 'almost overwhelmed by its power.'<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, in its search for engagement, it can also serve up some pretty troubling stuff.<sup>6</sup>

I myself experienced the algorithm at work as I was exploring TikTok's Christian subgenre. At first the app didn't know what to do with my search requests (i.e. 'Christian', 'church', 'Jesus',

etc.). It churned out a mixture of the most popular vaguely Christian videos, as well as some anti-religious content. Even the comment sections were filled with angry atheists and hypercritical agnostics. But after interacting with the app over a few days, my experience slowly changed. I began to see more and more pro-Christian videos, and the pessimistic comments faded away to be replaced by 'praise Jesus'. TikTok had deciphered what I liked and was now showing me more of those things to keep me hooked.

If that sounds manipulative, it is. But that's just how social media works. While it doesn't necessarily mean we should abandon it, at the very least we should use it with our eyes wide open.

So, what does approaching TikTok with Christian convictions and open eyes look like? If we take a posture of caution towards the adult themes and muddled Christian thought, I suggest that it can make a contribution to our spiritual lives. It offers peeks into cutting-edge Christian music and comedy, and lets us interact with fellow believers all around the world, showing we aren't as isolated as we may have thought.

But the downside to all that high access is the low barrier protecting you from the worst of humanity. You will hear ideas spread around TikTok that are factually dubious or spiritually tone-deaf, and people will criticise and demean your faith – all under the watchful eye of a manipulative algorithm developed by an amoral megacorporation.

So when you're online, keep Matthew 10:16 in mind: 'Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.' Be on guard against the unhealthy content, connect with faith-building TikTok-ers, and always remember that you exist within a great community of love and wisdom: the local church. If something on TikTok is confusing or troubles your faith, reach out to someone you trust and talk it through with them. In this way, we just might be able to navigate TikTok with wisdom, grace, and maturity. ◇



1 <https://sensortower.com/blog/tiktok-power-user-curve>

2 <https://www.engadget.com/senate-house-tiktok-ban-bill-anti-social-ccp-act-205120387.html>

3 <https://www.tiktok.com/@arlanfromnarnia/video/7113613081296538885?>

4 <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/oct/05/brittany-dawn-davis-tiktok-christian-social-media-influencer>

5 <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/oct/23/tiktok-rise-algorithm-popularity>

6 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/14/business/tiktok-safety-teens-eating-disorders-self-harm.html>

# Changes in the Dating and Relationship Landscape

## Food for Thought



Dale Christensen

In 1994, Kiss.com made history when it was registered as the first modern dating site.<sup>1</sup> Just 23 years later, polling by YouGov found that more than half of Australian millennials had used dating apps or websites at some point, and nearly two-thirds knew at least one couple who had met through these means.<sup>2</sup> The relationship landscape and how we meet each other has certainly changed.

Together with these changes have come changes in what we value in our significant others. As political opinions have become more central to identity, relationships across the partisan fence have become less common. Polling in the United Kingdom found that 28% of Labour voters and 19% of Conservatives would be unhappy or very unhappy for their children to have spouses who favoured the opposite party.<sup>3</sup>

These figures – gathered in 2016 – more than doubled the results from just eight years prior. Conversely, as religion has been marginalised to the periphery to most of the general public, interfaith dating has become less of a dealbreaker for many.<sup>4</sup>

Facing this brave new world, many young Christians are tempted to despair of finding a suitable partner. They feel the same longing that Adam did, with little confidence of a marriage partner in their future.

One idea that has gained some traction is to adapt to the times by setting up faith-based dating apps, such as Christian Mingle, Upward, Crosspaths, and Christian Cupid. These apps are designed to assist users to find partners with compatible values, but this is still far from guaranteed. For example, CatholicMatch has to ask users to reveal as part of their profile whether they 'agree with Church Teaching' on such things as the eucharist, contraception, and the sanctity of life. Users of faith-based dating apps also frequently report that they've received just as many lewd messages as they have on secular dating apps.

So what are we to do? The first and most significant action is the responsibility of the whole church to value and include single brothers and sisters and not to treat singleness as a disease to be cured. Singleness is a state we all experience at some point in our lives, and our worth before God has nothing to do with how long we spend in that state. Indeed, the apostle Paul wished that all servants of God were able to be celibate, as he was, since 'the unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.' (1 Corinthians 7:32–34)

We should beware of cultural practices that restrict the blessings of communal life to only those in romantic relationships. Of course, Scripture teaches that sexual intimacy is foreclosed to the single Christian, but the other delights of family life should not be. Single brothers and sisters should be regular guests at our dinner tables,<sup>5</sup> adopted aunts and uncles to our children, and valued partners in our Christian walk. Matthew 17 teaches us that the Christian family is to be radically hospitable and we must act accordingly.

Quickly-made relationship decisions are not inherently unwise, but decisions born of desperation to no longer be single almost always are. By lessening the cultural pressure to 'find your soulmate', we can help our single brothers and sisters to enjoy this time in their lives, rather than to feel as though they're just treading water until 'the one' arrives.

For those of you who long to be married and to start a family, I have little prescriptive advice. There is, however, the comfort of knowing from Scripture that: (1) you desire a good thing (Proverbs 18:22); (2) God loves you and wants what's best for you (along the lines of Jeremiah 29:11); and (3) God's timing is the best timing (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Personally if I were not yet married, I don't think I would use dating apps – faith-based or otherwise. However, God has brought couples together by all sorts of means, including dating apps. I know a brother-in-Christ who mistyped his friend's name into Snapchat and accidentally messaged a girl on the other side of the world. Several years ago I attended their wedding and God has now blessed them with a darling baby. His ways are not our ways! 'Put yourself out there' need not mean dedicating every waking moment to finding a date. Commit yourself to the work of the Lord and to the service of his kingdom, and you'll receive many homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers (Matthew 19:29), and – if God wills, in his time – a spouse who loves the Lord as you do. ♦

1 [www.brainz.org/history-online-dating/](http://www.brainz.org/history-online-dating/)

2 [au.yougov.com/news/2017/11/23/internet-dating/](http://au.yougov.com/news/2017/11/23/internet-dating/)

3 [www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/feb/10/parents-disapprove-son-daughter-in-law-different-political-persuasion](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/feb/10/parents-disapprove-son-daughter-in-law-different-political-persuasion)

4 McAloney, K. (2013) 'Inter-faith relationships in Great Britain: Prevalence and implications for psychological well-being', 16(7) *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 686–694.

5 And not merely for the purposes of introductions and matchmaking!

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## News *KlesisEquip Courses*

Jessie Xiao xiaohj1014@gmail.com

I undertook two KlesisEquip courses in 2022. The first course, *Rightly Handling the Word*, helped me to gain an understanding of how the Old Testament and New Testament were brought to us, and why we need to interpret the Bible. The second course, *The Drama of Scripture*, demonstrated that God's story becomes our story when we join with God to accomplish his plan. During both courses, I learnt how to identify common issues in interpreting the Bible. Through developing various approaches of biblical interpretation, I learnt how to implement systematic steps to understand the Bible in my own time of study.

There are many benefits of studying these courses. First, they help Christians to improve their understanding of the Bible so that they can apply biblical principles better and teach those who are exploring the Word. Second, they renew our faith through the application of biblical principles, and this can only be achieved when we have a deeper and clear understanding of God's Word. Third, they help us to see our roles in God's plan that has been revealed through Scripture. Consequently, we can be more obedient to God's teaching when we find ourselves in the storyline of Scripture. ◇



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Joy Tabalujan joy.tabalujan98@gmail.com

## *Young Women's Prayer Group*

The Young Christians Network (YCN) was established in late-2020 during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its purpose is to connect young men and women (aged between 18 and 35 years) in Churches of Christ throughout Australia and New Zealand. YCN has organised five virtual events with over 30 participants at each of them over the last two years.

Although YCN has had a brief hiatus in the last six months, we plan to start off 2023 activities by organising a weekly/fortnightly online prayer group for young Christian women.

We recognise that many young people are already involved in Bible studies and service activities in their local

congregations. Consequently, we thought that organising a regular women's prayer group would enable greater flexibility and also encourage us to foster closer, more authentic friendships with each other. Regardless of location and culture, all Christians crave connection with other Christians of a similar age. The Christian journey is not meant to be walked alone but alongside others.

If you are interested, please reach out to Joy Tabalujan (joy.tabalujan98@gmail.com) and get ready to meet some other young Christian women from around Australia and New Zealand! ◇

Lily Jennings (Canberra Church of Christ)

## *Camp Challenge*

After three years of cancellations due to bushfires and Covid-19, Camp Challenge was back in 2022, and better than ever. The theme, *Spiritual Orienteering*, was taught by Graham Wall, who delivered daily talks about the various spiritual terrains we might encounter in our walk with Christ. The notorious talent and auction nights were held, as well as the huge New Year's Eve dance which was much fun for everyone.

Hosted for the first time at Camp Fletcher in the Blue Mountains, it was a perfect place to hold outdoor activities like volleyball and cricket, plus water play activities and a bushwalk or two.

I personally enjoyed meeting and spending time with all the families who made Challenge all the more special. They came from all over Australia – 100 campers from Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria, the ACT, and NSW. The singing at camp was phenomenal (causing goosebumps all around) and was on full display in the daily *Prayer and Praise* sessions. Camp was revived and really caused everyone who came along to feel a sense of togetherness after such a long time. I'm so excited for Camp Challenge 2023! ◇



# Media Review

## Podcasts and Apps

Dale Christensen



**Salty & Bright** – In each episode of this interview podcast, host & producer **Faith Tabalujan** (Belmore Road Church of Christ) explores the story and Christian life of one guest. The first season (seven episodes) is straightforwardly biographical, as Faith starts with the same set of questions for each guest on how they were able to establish a firm spiritual foundation in their lives. In the second season (eight episodes) Faith interviews brothers and sisters who have something to teach us about evangelism. A key strength of this project is the range of guests: Faith is well-connected both internationally and intergenerationally within Churches of Christ, so the life experiences guests share are genuinely varied and interesting. Nevertheless, they have the common thread that binds us together – faith in and reliance on the Lord Jesus. As far as I know, this is Faith's first foray into both interviewing and audio production, but you wouldn't know it! A really encouraging listen. *Available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify, but not on some other niche platforms.*



**Bible, Glitter, & Glue** – Hosted by **David** and **Mary Nelson** of the Otūmoetai Church of Christ in New Zealand, this new podcast is a great resource for anyone tasked with the awesome and daunting responsibility of passing on the Christian faith to children. The Nelsons have many years of experience in teaching the Bible to young and old (you may have come across Mary's website missionbibleclass.org, a treasure trove of Sunday School materials). In each episode of their podcast, they explore a Bible story with particular attention to effectively communicating the lesson to little ones. They break the story into bite-sized chunks and step through it, providing links to other important Bible stories, and simple class discussions and activities you can build into your lesson. A particular strength is their ability to identify difficult concepts for children to grasp, and suggesting kid-friendly explanations. Have you ever considered how you might explain Satan to a pre-schooler without giving them nightmares? Never fear, the Nelsons are here to help you navigate those tricky waters with fun and wisdom. *Available on most platforms.*



**The Briefing** – A daily news and current events podcast hosted by **Al Mohler**, a prominent Southern Baptist based in Kentucky (USA). This recommendation comes with a few caveats: it's naturally US-centric; it tends to focus obsessively on a handful of hot-button topics (abortion, religious liberty, gender and sexuality, etc.); and Mohler's analysis is sometimes more reflective of his position as a political conservative than as a public theologian. Putting that aside, *The Briefing* is a useful introduction to viewing current events from a Christian worldview. We cannot consume news and politics as non-Christians do, with culture, partisanship, or even intuition as our guide. We are Christians first, and our response to the world around us should be reflective of that fact. So use this podcast to practise seeing current events through this lens; but don't let the news and politics of the day consume your every thought. *Available on most platforms.*

*I imagine I'm not the only one who (1) reads/listens to the Bible on my phone; and (2) simply searched 'Bible' and installed the most popular app. Daniel Smith from the Gipps Street Church of Christ in Toowoomba gives us a quick rundown of the market leader in Bible apps, as well as some quality but lesser-known options. Each is available on both Apple and Android platforms.*

The **YouVersion Bible** app is the most popular Bible app in the world (with over 500 million downloads). It has the greatest number of translations and many of these include audio. Perhaps its best feature is being able to add friends and complete reading plans together.

**Dwell** is an app designed to make Bible listening a joy. With 17 different voices and 12 translations available, you can listen to the Scriptures at the exact pace and style that you need. It has playlists and plans so that you can, for example, listen to the Psalms in a month or Genesis in a week. Dwell is a paid app – about AU\$60 a year – but is worth every cent.

The **ESV Bible** app is easy to use and well designed. It has a beautiful layout that makes reading a joy. It also has an audio Bible function and has excellent cross-references through the text.

The **BibleHub** app takes some time to get used to, but it has the best free access to Bible study resources. You can quickly understand the original Greek and Hebrew words and access dictionaries and commentaries.

Finally, here's a bonus (non-Bible) app recommendation: **PrayerMate** helps to deepen and strengthen your prayer life for free. First, you input all the items that you would like to pray for on a regular basis. Then each day it will pick an assortment of items from each of your lists to make sure your prayers aren't stuck in a rut. Whether you choose short or long prayers, PrayerMate helps us to be genuine when we say, 'I'll pray for you'. ◇



In this issue, our International Letter and Interview sections can be read together to highlight the challenges five young adults face in their Christian walks. Beliza Patricia, a sister from Brazil, writes about her conversion and beginnings in the faith. In our vox-pop style interview, **Adelphie Stokes (SA)**, **Micah Kirkpatrick (ACT)**, **Ashlee Watt (QLD)**, and **Sean Kelly (NSW)** share their reflections on challenges they have faced. We hope you're encouraged by their sharing – you are not alone! – Ed.

## Reflections on Challenges

# International Letter

Beliza Patricia



I remember praying at my living room window saying, 'God, I only want to do this if it's your will. I hope that it is your will, but even if it is not, could you please make it your will? Because I want to do your will!'

That was a very honest prayer - from an immature young Christian. It was said in the middle of a situation where I did not know what I should do.

When we talk about young people, we tend to think about their ages. But, when I hear something about young people, the first thing that comes to mind is choices. There are many choices to make, like choosing a profession, choosing a job, choosing a city to live in, choosing whom to marry... phew! All of these choices can have consequences that last for the rest of your life; some even for eternal life.

I, like most of the young Christians I meet in Brazil, do not come from a Christian family. We did not grow up learning about God's love and his will. Growing up, I did not know what I wanted to do, where I wanted to go, nor how to make good choices. I just knew that I didn't want to repeat the same mistakes that I saw around me. I wanted to write a different story, but I had no idea how to do that - until a friend from school invited me to attend a church camp. At this camp, I saw husbands who loved their wives, and wives who respected their husbands. I saw couples who raised their children with love and young people who were having fun without swearing or drinking alcohol. I saw people being kind and helping each other. It seemed so out of my reality, and I thought: I want my life to be like this, I want to be a part of it.

After camp, I started to study the Bible with a sister from church. I had so many questions, and I felt so lost. But the more I learnt, the more I felt like being a part of it all. Even though I got closer to some people than others, the church, as a whole, was responsible for evangelising me.

But back to choices: things don't change instantly after baptism. Not all my choices were right. Something that transformed my Christian journey was understanding that I needed other people. In particular, I need more experienced Christians with whom I could share temptations and ask for guidance before important decisions. These Christians would then be able to advise me with love according to my situation. I also needed people my age, especially other girls who also wanted to do God's will and who could be companions. This is important as we could share the ups and downs of this journey to heaven. Furthermore, I needed people that I could serve, people with whom I could somehow cooperate with and help. A part of that for me was getting involved with the Children's Ministry and Youth Ministry where I have served to this day.

One of the things I learned while teaching children was the importance of memorising verses. This has helped me so much! By the way, teaching children made me grow a lot because in order to teach them I had to study a lot of the Bible and it allowed me to develop bonds with other people who also wanted to serve God.

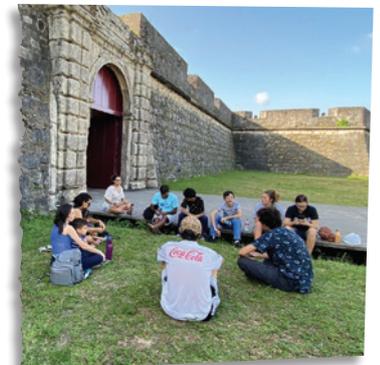
One of the most important choices while we are young is to choose wisely whom we want to be friends with. This is a common difficulty among the young people I know, as we spend a lot of time with our classmates from school and university. But it is important to spend quality time with people who want to do God's will, and being involved in ministry is a great way to do that.

Many things have been difficult for me, and often doing what God wants requires me to act against all my instincts. But the more I get to know the stories of people before and after meeting Jesus, and even as I look back on my life and the choices I've made, I think of this passage:

*'From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."' (John 6:66–68)*

Knowing that there is no true life, no true love, no true peace, and no true joy apart from God gives me courage and strength to persist.

Even with difficulties, and even though the temptations come, I cannot imagine my life without serving God, without having my big family, which is the church, or without the certainty that I can choose to do his will and rest. I am grateful to God for allowing me to know his Word during my youth and thus giving me the chance to do his will in the choices that I need to make. ♦



## Adelphie Stokes, Micah Kirkpatrick, Ashlee Watt, Sean Kelly



### What challenges did you face / are you facing as a young Christian?

**Ashlee Watt:** I became a Christian at 17, and one of the challenges I've faced in my walk with Christ has been the fact that my family are not Christians. It's tricky sometimes to balance my love for my family with my love for Jesus. He obviously comes first, but I'm also trying to shine his light into their lives and invite them into relationship with him, so I don't want them to see him as pulling me away from them.

Another challenge in recent years is being part of a very small congregation, where all other members are my parents' age or older. They're beautiful people and very encouraging, but I do miss being able to walk alongside Christians my own age or younger.



**Sean Kelly:** The reluctance that some leaders in the church have had for utilising and training up young Christians, men and women, into specific roles within the church community. Also, when we are impatient and divisive in our discussions about Scripture we cause much damage to the church. There absolutely needs to be clear understanding of biblical truth and following the way that Christ wanted the church to function, but we also need to show continuous effort to maintain unity within the church. The church will not grow in division and disunity.



**Adelphie Stokes:** Growing up among Churches of Christ, the biggest challenge for me was seeing all the children I grew up with in Bible Class fall or move away. It was just me and my younger sister left.

**Micah Kirkpatrick:** Probably people's general perceptions about God and Christianity. A faith in a higher power is often seen as ridiculous given everything we allegedly know about the world around us. God is often portrayed as a vindictive and petty god who seeks to punish people for simply being who they are. The Bible is seen as dated and primitive, and its origins are disputed. Finally, Christians are often seen as moral busybodies pointing their finger at people and judging them, putting themselves on a higher pedestal than your everyday Joe. Trying to dismantle those barriers and preconceptions and show God's faithful character despite my imperfection is perhaps the greatest challenge I face.



### What helps you keep the faith?

**MK:** I was recently driving with my wife, and she asked me how I felt knowing that of all the people I had grown up with at my local church, I was one of the few left. I hadn't really thought about it like that before, but it was largely true. As people matured and grew up, they moved on – some to other churches and states, others away from the faith altogether. I was reminded in that moment that I keep the faith not because of those around me, but because what God says is true. The race we run is a marathon, not a sprint. I keep the faith because God is good, he has provided for me in ways I never thought possible, and I know he will be with me until I leave this earth.

**AS:** I have kept my faith because I am in this for my own salvation. I do not attend church just to catch up with friends. Yes, at times, it has been discouraging and lonely, but I always compare my sacrifice to Jesus dying on the cross. I can keep attending a small church if Jesus died for me. Other things that help me are having a supportive, faithful family, visiting different congregations, and attending Camp Warana in Tasmania. Knowing there are still other like-minded young Christians around is encouraging.

**AW:** What has helped me keep the faith is remembering that no matter what challenges I face in this life, Jesus is greater and eternity will make those challenges pale into insignificance. Also, maintaining solid friendships with other Christians both in my local congregation and elsewhere has been really helpful. I can talk to them about our blessings and hardships and I am reminded that, though we all face hardship, God is always there for us and is bigger than all our challenges.

**SK:** The incredible friendships I've formed over the years through attending various youth events and church camps where we enjoyed wonderful conversations about our understanding of Scripture and sharing our faith. These friends come from various Churches of Christ in Australia. My favourite times are when we come together to sing hymns and songs, with beautiful harmonies that edify each other as we praise and worship God. ◇

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