

# How God Can Light Your Way



Christopher News Notes

**FAITH, COURAGE, SACRIFICE, HOPE, LOVE.** These are all virtues that you will find in the interviews we feature on our *Christopher Closeup* radio series and podcast. Often, our guests have experienced major periods of darkness in their lives, but with God's help, they were able to "light one candle" and move forward toward a brighter future. Here are some examples of interviews from the show to provide you with wisdom, guidance, and inspiration.

## Service Was a Great Healer

Gary Sinise sat at Mass feeling devastated. It was the Friday after September 11, 2001, and the actor was heartbroken at the loss of life that had occurred in the terrorist attacks in New York City, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview about his memoir *Grateful American*, Sinise said, “I remember crying through the Mass and feeling with this broken heart that service to others was a great healer.”

Though he was already involved in veterans’ causes since playing Lt. Dan Taylor in the movie *Forrest Gump*, Sinise increased his efforts, using his spare time and musical talents to entertain members of the military being sent to Afghanistan and, later, Iraq. “I started going to war zones, hospitals, entertaining on military bases across the country and around the world. I started raising money for multiple military charities, all as a volunteer... I found that the more I gave, the more relief I received...because I could see that I was doing some good. Was it God calling me to service? It very well could be... This is a life mission.”

## Everything Life Takes, Love Restores

Author Meadow Rue Merrill and her husband, Dana, had been thinking of adopting a child, but as the parents of two young boys and a girl, they weren’t sure this was the right time. That changed when they met Ruth, a young orphan from Uganda who was being hosted by a friend of theirs from church. Though Ruth had severe cerebral palsy, the Merrills fell in love with her infectious sense of joy. They adopted Ruth and welcomed her into their family, where she thrived for several years.

Unfortunately, Ruth’s health problems led to her unexpected death in 2011. Meadow found her faith tested, and asked God why He would allow this to happen. She still doesn’t have an answer to that particular question, but she has found comfort in a different perspective, which she writes about in her Christopher Award-winning memoir *Redeeming Ruth*—and which she discussed on *Christopher Closeup*.

Meadow said, “As the Lord began to work in my heart, I had this assurance that there was nothing we could lose of value here that would not be restored in heaven...I knew that God’s love was enough to redeem [Ruth], and ultimately, that she will experience a life with Him in a completely restored body forever—and that I will get to see her some day again.”

## A Journey of Faith

With on-air jobs as co-anchor of *Good Morning America’s* weekend edition and co-host of *The View*, Paula Faris felt overextended and realized that her husband and three children were getting “the rest of me, not the best of me,” she said on *Christopher Closeup*. But she allowed fear to paralyze her from following the path to which she believed God was calling her: “to take a step away from these two assignments and refocus my priority compass.”

Then, her self-described eight-month “season of hell” began. Paula suffered a miscarriage that required emergency surgery; she endured a severe concussion when someone threw an apple at her head while she was reporting a story; she sustained injuries in a car crash; and she got pneumonia.

During that period, Paula felt like God was asking her to trust His will about changing her work schedule. This time, she listened. She worked out a deal with her bosses at *ABC News* which allowed her to work only on weekdays, and also create a new podcast called *Journeys of Faith*, on which she would interview newsmakers about their spiritual beliefs. Paula noted that her Christian faith has been “my rock, my glue, my foundation. It has kept my marriage together. It has pulled me through the most difficult and trying times.”

## Mercy Over Judgment

“A wasted drunk girl in a bar in Amarillo, Texas, sleeping with different guys who didn’t care about her, and wasting her life away.” That’s how Leticia Ochoa Adams describes her life 13 years ago. Her bad choices, she now believes, were the result of a troubled childhood in which she was abandoned

by her father and sexually abused. “What I’ve come to understand,” she said, “is that all of the things I was doing [were done] in search of love.”

When Leticia’s childhood boyfriend, Stacey, came back into her life in 2008, they moved in together and discussed marriage. Because Stacey was Catholic, he insisted the wedding would have to be in a Catholic church. Leticia took steps to convert, she explained on *Christopher Closeup*, but “with no intention of changing my life or encountering God...I just wanted my sacraments, get married, move on with my life.”

Instead, she attended an RCIA class run by Noe Rocha at St. William Church. He looked right at Leticia when he said, “God loves you more than you think He does. No matter how far you’ve gone, no matter what you’ve done, He loves you exactly how you are.” This revelation pierced Leticia’s heart and soul, and she began seeking God like never before. She met with the parish priest to discuss her questions and sometimes to rant and rave about God. The priest responded with patience, kindness, and love, leading to her conversion.

Leticia admits that if she had been met with judgment instead of mercy, she wouldn’t have followed through on her inclination to join the Church: “When we’re evangelizing people, we have to understand that the reason those people are asking questions—or why they’re showing up to Mass when you can’t really figure out why because they don’t do anything else Catholic—the reason is God. That’s God’s voice calling them to Him. We can either cooperate with the voice of God...or we can cooperate with the evil one who’s telling them they don’t belong here. That really is our choice as Catholics.”

## A Message From Dad

Bonnie Hunt is familiar to anyone who has watched her classic films, such as *Cheaper by the Dozen*, *Jumanji*, and *Return to Me*. But before becoming an actress and writer, she grew up in a large Catholic family in Chicago and entered

nursing school at the encouragement of her beloved father, Bob. When Bob shockingly suffered a heart attack and died at age 50, Bonnie endured near-total despair and felt angry at God. She also decided to quit nursing school. Her motivation for that career died with Bob.

Bonnie's mom, Alice, convinced her to at least go back to school for one more week in honor of Bob. On her first day back, Bonnie almost regretted her decision when one of the nursing instructors took her aside and said, "You know, Hunt, you're not the only person whose father ever died, so you've got to buck up...You can't be telling people what's going on in your life." Though Bonnie accepted these orders without complaint, inside she felt bitter and pained at the heartlessness of the instructor's comments.

Then, the time came for the nursing students to be assigned the patients they would care for. Though there were hundreds in the hospital, Bonnie was directed to a man named Mr. O'Brien. After she introduced herself, he cheerfully called her "my Bonnie lass" and told her he was "doomed" because he had terminal cancer.

Bonnie was taken aback by how casually he spoke of his own impending death, but Mr. O'Brien explained, "I feel lucky to have cancer...I'm Irish, and there's a lot we don't say to our families. We're kind of stoic. But now I've been able to tell my boys how much I love them and tell my bride...I had a friend who died really suddenly,

and he'd always talk about his kids as his greatest accomplishment. He didn't get to say goodbye, and I'm getting that opportunity."

Bonnie got to know Mr. O'Brien better over the next few days, and developed a real affection for him. When she learned he worked at the Board of Education, which was where her father had worked, she decided to break the rules her instructor had given her. She asked him if he knew her father, Bob Hunt. Mr. O'Brien reached out and touched Bonnie's arm, saying, "That's the man who died suddenly that I've been speaking about."

Bonnie and Mr. O'Brien cried together about the loss of Bob and this unlikely connection between the two of them. She decided she couldn't leave Mr. O'Brien, so she stayed his student nurse until his death a few months later.

On *Christopher Closeup*, Bonnie told program host Tony Rossi, "When I look back at my life, becoming a nurse defined me in so many ways and gave me a more thoughtful approach to my life. And patients gave me a deep perspective. I really believe in divine intervention because I think my Dad got to heaven and said, 'Don't let her go to Hollywood! Don't let her leave nursing school! Can we find anyone within a five mile vicinity that could stop her?!' Somehow, they found this one patient out of 500. I mean, I was assigned one patient!"

That connection also helped Bonnie begin to resolve her anger at God and her grief in general. She said, "Anybody that's experienced great loss, whether it's instant or...somebody with cancer... the loss is so deep that anger is part of the emotion—and getting to acceptance is part of the journey. Definitely Mr. O'Brien was a bridge. Until this day, whenever I experience great sadness...the thing that helps me the most is to help someone else."

  
**"It's better to light one candle  
than to curse the darkness."**

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