Dear mum...

It's exactly one month until Mother's Day. There you go—now there’s no excuse for not lavishing your mum with love in May. If flowers or chocolates aren't your cup of tea, here's something else you can do. Email <news@record.net.au> a high resolution picture of your mother and a 60-word (max) explanation of what makes her so great. RECORD will print a selection of messages in our Mother's Day issue, in churches on May 4. Be quick—the deadline for submissions is this Wednesday, April 17!

Am I right?

How do we really know what's right, and who actually decides what is right or wrong? Yes, as Christians we’d all
agree God decides—but how do we know how to apply God’s principles to a given circumstance or challenge? Central Coast Adventist School teacher Fiona Jackson tackles the tough questions.

**Aussie Adventist abroad**

Two years ago, Dr Philip Brown was called from his position as vice president (Learning and Teaching) at Avondale College of Higher Education to serve as principal of Newbold College of Higher Education in England. James Standish, a Newbold graduate himself, recently caught up with Dr Brown to find out how things are progressing.

**Fallen idols**

They called him the Blade Runner, “the fastest man on no legs”; Oscar Pistorius, the first amputee to compete in an Olympic track event. Oscar’s story is one of courage against the odds. His story is also one if immense tragedy, and a reminder of how upholding earthly, clay idols always leaves us disappointed.
*This week's offering (April 13, 2013): World Mission Budget Offering

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from Linden Chuang, RECORD editorial assistant

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Am I right?

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I'd had a long, hard day at work but forced myself to go grocery shopping on my way home. It was hot, the lines were long and the wheels on my trolley seemed to catch on every stone in the parking lot. As I got to my car at last, I went to open the boot like I'd done a thousand times, but this time the key didn't fit. I jammed it one way, jostled it another, all the time getting increasingly exasperated. I can still see the shocked look of the mother and her two young children as they observed my rising frustration. They stood at a safe distance in front of my actual car that sat two spaces down, waiting for the weird woman to leave their car alone.

Humbling? You bet! You see I was so sure I was at the right car with the right key, but ended up being so obviously wrong. And I've had the same scenario repeated in precisely the opposite way—where I've toyed with an idea but then decided it was probably wrong, only later to find out it was precisely right! If I have been wrong when I thought I was right and right when I thought I was wrong, are the chances good that what I think now is wrong and what I thought in the past was right? Or am I wrong? Life's confusing!

In an attempt to find answers I asked people the question, "How do we really know what's right?" There are so many different ideas and opinions that ricochet around the church, the classrooms, the community and the professional world. I asked my husband the question and he said with a grin that he is always right and I don't have to worry. Now that's something I'm very sure is wrong!

But it does raise the question: who actually decides what is right or wrong? Yes, as
Christians we’d all agree God decides—but how do we know how to apply God’s principles to a given circumstance or challenge? Do we go to a committee? A board? A well-meaning individual who is happy to tell you and anybody else what you’re doing is wrong? Or is it a fact that the question to be asked and explored is more important than the answer itself? Of course we have the moral commandments, the golden rule, to guide us, but in specific situations that involve culture, time and context, sometimes the application of these timeless principles can and does get tricky. If you don’t believe me, think about the most important questions facing you in your family, your workplace or your church. Even among people who all agree on the same principles, the application often gets very complicated and controversial.

Is it perhaps that the answer lies waiting in a gift-wrapped paradox? Is it in the complexity of determining what's right or wrong that we are actually forced to pause, reflect, consider, search and discover the colossal helplessness of not knowing and, as a result, come to realise our deep need for God?

The lie from Eden that we would become "all knowing and like God" is exposed in our growing confusion and helplessness. It's then in the base realisation of our mortality and human limitations that we step out in faith without knowing if our direction is right but knowing the intent of our heart is pure and that our God is just, fair, loving, kind, patient and, thankfully, in control. Is it an essential exercise in faith to consider moving forward with things that are new, challenging and unknown, allowing God in His time to make clear to us His desired outcome and purpose? Is it through this process and act of faith that God creates a more meaningful and personal relationship with us?

In my search for a way to correctly apply the principles I believe, I reviewed Bible stories I grew up with. I marvelled and at the same time breathed a sigh of relief when I discovered that key characters like Moses, Esther and even the disciples, who knew Jesus personally, also got confused over what's right and what's not. In fact, in just about every Bible story we grew up with, we find the human perception of rightness and wrongness being overshadowed by God’s bigger view.

Moses, for example, thought he was the wrong person to go and speak to Pharaoh. He had a point. Who would choose an exiled murderer who had spent four decades roaming around the wilderness with sheep to lead anything? But God decided otherwise. In his fear and trembling Moses put his faith in God, even though it wasn’t easy. Moses learned that if it's a part of God’s plan it will turn out right. As a result of God’s grace, Moses grew closer to God, a closeness he needed as he faced more indecision and turmoil over the next 40 years.
Similarly, Esther didn’t know what the right thing to do was. Yet after prayer and searching, and no doubt sleepless nights, she went into the King uninvited saying, "if I perish, I perish". God was with her all the way; the doors opened, the sceptre was raised and the people saved. Looking back, her decision was obviously right. But if she had died, would we be so sure?

On the other hand, the disciples were sure they were right when they wanted to crown Christ as an earthly King and destroy the Romans in a long-awaited victorious uprising. Keenly waiting for Christ to take action, they were so convinced they had it right that they could not understand what Christ Himself was clearly telling them about His approaching crucifixion, resurrection and the heavenly kingdom.

We should all go back to some of the well-known Bible stories and re-read the struggles that individuals in the past had in working out what was right and what was wrong. We should reflect on how God used their uncertainty to either demonstrate His purpose and will in a miraculous way or strengthen their weakness in moments of personal anguish, bitterness and regret. For some He broke down their pride piece by piece so they could see Him more clearly; for others it was the searching, questioning and discussion itself that led them to the feet of God.

It would appear then that it is in the searching for right and wrong that one finds a deeper connection with God regardless of the answer to the original question. It is through the controversy, the discussions, the reflection, the opposing views, the individual searching, that one may find themselves drawn closer to God by God.

So, what's right? In this world, culture, context, time and humanity will always be at play in influencing our perception of what's right and wrong. What then is the right thing to do in dealing with tough issues and indecision? A wise man a long time ago who was trying to work out what was right and wrong himself found this answer: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5,6). Put another way, dry learning will only get us so far. We must have a personal, trusting relationship with God, as only by living in His presence will we know how to apply His principles to all the complexities and ambiguities we’ll face in life. And even then, like Paul, we have to admit that we see through a glass darkly (I Corinthians 13:12). So, while we can be fully confident of God, we must take care to avoid overconfidence in ourselves.

When I finally got to my car that day in the shopping centre parking lot, the key slipped in perfectly, and within no time I was driving home—a little humiliated, but very grateful.
Getting even little things right can make a very big difference.

Fiona Jackson is an English teacher at Central Coast Adventist School, who is currently taking a "gap year" to write, travel and do all the other important things in life.
Two years ago, Dr Philip Brown was called from his position as vice president (Learning and Teaching) at Avondale College of Higher Education to serve as principal of Newbold College of Higher Education in England. James Standish, a Newbold graduate himself, recently caught up with Dr Brown to find out how things are progressing.

**Dr Philip Brown.**

**RECORD:** How have the English embraced an Aussie leading their college?

**BROWN:** As you know, Newbold is the most international of places. Currently we have students and staff on campus from 63 countries. A non-English principal isn’t novel for Newbold; Steve Thompson, who is now at Avondale, was Newbold principal, as was Jan Paulsen, to name just two of them. I’m just following in that tradition—though I’m the first Australian to serve in this role.

**RECORD:** Student numbers are up significantly at Newbold since you took over leadership. Why?
BROWN: Newbold is set on arguably the most beautiful campus our Church has—with an historic manor house, romantic gardens and a picturesque village all around us. Windsor Castle is only a short drive away, London is less than an hour by train and, of course, many of our students spend their holidays travelling in Europe. It’s hard not to soak in the history, culture and energy of Europe when you study here.

We’ve also done a couple of things to make Newbold more student–friendly in recent years. We’ve upgraded a lot of our facilities to ensure our students enjoy comfort and convenience, as well as the beauty, charm and culture. Improved facilities are attracting students from around the world who are serious about their faith and their studies. In addition, by joining Adventist Colleges Abroad, we’ve made it easier for students from around the world to attend Newbold. But I think most importantly, we commit this endeavour to God every day and I am sincerely grateful for His blessing.

RECORD: What is the best way for students from our part of the world to enjoy the Newbold experience?

This mid–year (June 17–July 26) we have an intensives program featuring some of the most engaging and accomplished academics in the Adventist world. They will offer intensive classes ranging from CS Lewis: Literature and the Religious Life to The Reformation: An Historical Perspective; from Cross–Cultural Management to Media, Religion and Culture. There are even postgraduate theology courses. Can you think of a better place to come in contact with literature, theology, international business or history, than a college situated in the heart of it all?

Also, if you’re a student at a college that’s part of the Adventist Colleges Abroad consortium (Avondale is one), you can, depending on your field of study, attend Newbold for up to a year and still graduate from your home college.

RECORD: Is there any chance you’ll eventually come back to the South Pacific?

BROWN: Absolutely! Deep down, I think every Australian loves to call Australia home wherever they may be serving at a particular point in time. Along with my family, I made a commitment to the Trans European Division to serve in this role for up to five years. Of course, we may stay abroad longer, but we put all of this in God’s hands. For the time being, we just love the opportunity to serve in this very rich and exciting environment.

James Standish is editor of RECORD.
I've got a photo of him on my computer desktop—the elite athlete at full stretch as he bounds down the track on carbon fibre springs. They called him the Blade Runner, “the fastest man on no legs”; Oscar Pistorius, the first amputee to compete in an Olympic track event. And although he didn’t take away a medal for South Africa at the London 2012 Games, he was a serious contender and carried his nation’s flag at the closing ceremony.

Oscar’s story is one of courage against the odds. Both legs amputated below the knee when he was 11; his mother dead when he was 15. Nevertheless he has achieved athletic feats that few able-bodied people can dream of. Raised in a Christian family and with 1 Corinthians 9:26 tattooed on his back, he was public about his faith and its key part in his success.

And then it came like a punch in the guts. Oscar Pistorius charged with shooting his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp. Four times through a bathroom door. It occurred on a night after neighbours reportedly heard the sound of arguing. In the scramble to explain how it could have happened, the tabloids revealed a high-octane playboy lifestyle involving multiple women. Accusations were made of a jealous, violent temper and performance-enhancing drugs. Indeed the media have been dining out on every scrap of gossip and speculation they can find on Pistorius, reliable or otherwise.

Oscar Pistorius’s image is still on my desktop. It needs to stay there at least until the conflicting emotions it triggers can be sorted into a semblance of order. There are lessons to be learned here, starting with how easy it is to join the feeding frenzy when a talented
person’s flaws are revealed. Somehow it seems we’re less forgiving when we’re let down by someone we’ve admired.

I’ve searched for heroes for many years, looking for examples of godly lives in history and contemporary society. And although I’ve assembled an impressive collection of biographies, I’m never quite satisfied. The brilliant thought-leaders rarely put their formulas into action. The humanitarians betray their noble ideals in favour of pragmatic solutions. Parents lie, teachers exploit, entrepreneurs cut corners, evangelists sneer. A closer examination of any of these clay idols ends in disappointment.

With one exception. Jesus always challenges me to aim higher; to be more radical and yet more balanced. To speak out more strongly and yet with more compassion. To give without expecting recompense. To turn the other cheek. To love my enemies. Again and again my Dagons fall on their faces, cracked before His presence; humbled by His grace.

And I’m left with a pantheon of One.

Kent Kingston is assistant editor of RECORD.