

Kate's kitchen table

Famous for winning MasterChef in 2011, Kate Bracks is returning to Perth for a City Bible Forum event where she will be sharing stories and three of her favourite recipes. Vanessa Klomp had the opportunity to catch up with Kate before she presents 'Kate's Kitchen Table' on 29 June.

How did you become interested in cooking and what led you to apply for MasterChef?

I've always loved cooking for as long as I can remember, but I do vividly remember a long Christmas holiday when I said to Mum I was bored and she said why don't you cook something. I cooked the entire day, baking a layered cake and piping icing on it, and absolutely loved it. For me, this was probably the time where I thought I absolutely love cooking. I think I was around eight or ten at that time. I continued cooking throughout my teen years, generally baking cakes, biscuits and sweet desserts more than anything else.

Applying for MasterChef was somewhat of an accident. My husband had suggested I apply for the first season and my initial response was I am not going on TV that is ridiculous! He said why don't you just watch an episode of the UK version online, so I did. I thought that looks like fun, so I went online and filled out the application form. The last question of the form asked if you are willing to be away from your family for up to a month of filming, and my baby at the time was only one. I immediately thought, no I am not willing to do it.

I then watched MasterChef avidly for season one and two and there was an ad at the end of season two stating applications for season three were being taken, so I went online more out of curiosity.

It had become this very popular show that it hadn't been when I first heard about it so I was interested to know how the application form had changed. It was much longer and you had to fill in every field before you could go on to the next page. So gradually over the course of a few days I filled it out, more out of curiosity and then I accidentally pressed send. I remember thinking "oh no, I didn't mean to send that". I got a reply, and then there was a lot of toing and froing with my husband and he said to go for it, "it's a great opportunity". He said to me, "just go, the door has opened and it's not like you are going to win it", so off I went.

What have you been doing since winning MasterChef in 2011?

Immediately after it finished, I found myself in the fast lane of life, travelling a lot, largely cooking demonstrations and

public speaking events, which have carried on to this day, but to a lesser degree. It escalated quite quickly and didn't seem to be dying down so I took active steps in 2014 to take some time away from travel as it was having a big impact on my family. I needed to make it more sustainable for the long term. Now I probably do four to eight a year. In my first year, I did about 40 which took up a lot of the first part of coming home.

As I pulled back from the travel, I set-up a cake making business in Orange supplying cafes. At the end of 2015, there were a few things going on in our extended family which required more time from me so, I went back to teaching at the beginning of last year. I am now teaching high school food technology part-time at Kinross Wolaroi School, Orange, teaching religious education in the primary school, as well as a chaplaincy role a few days a week.

I continue to do cooking demonstrations and public speaking on the side. I'm working on a project around NSW teaching people with Health Care Cards the basics of cooking. It is also connected with an organisation called NetWaste, which is interested in reducing kitchen waste, and the Cancer Council which is interested in reducing the rate of cancer by helping people understand how their food can play a preventative role.

How did you develop a faith in Christ?

I had grown up in a Christian family but wasn't really living as a Christian in my early twenties. I would have said I believed there was a God. At that time of my life I was really questioning who we are as people and why we are here on earth, so I went looking for answers. I investigated quite a few of the major world religions and ways of thinking about life over the course of a year, asking lots of questions and reading lots of books.

In the end, what I came back to was that the God of the Bible that I largely grew up with was actually the only one that really made sense to me in the way the world works. What struck me, it was the only way of thinking about the world which didn't revolve around us needing to please somebody else or work our way [to a relationship with God]. It is all about what God had actually done for humanity. I found this incredibly intriguing. I then

started attending church again and this is when I first understood the concept of grace fully. It is not about what we do but what God has done for us. I became a Christian around then.

While on the show, you refused to call the Dalai Lama 'your holiness', saying that "My belief is that God is the only one that is perfectly holy." Did it give you the opportunity to speak about your faith?

This was an amazing opportunity to the point of exhaustion. Everybody from executive producers, judges, other producers and contestants came to me. I had numerous conversations. While most of them knew that I was a Christian because it came out on my application form, I don't think many of them thought that I would go that far, and so I think they were quite surprised that I would take a stand.

I always want to show respect to everybody but first and foremost to God, and so if that means that I might offend people along the way that's not my intention. God is more important than what anybody else thinks so that's what instigated my response at the time.

Yes, it opened a massive number of opportunities for me and continued on well after the show because some of my cooking demonstrations and public speaking events were in churches where people wanted to know more about this and invited friends along to come and hear my testimony as well. It did have a very big ripple effect. There are still people that ask about it.

At the time, the media was kept away from us so it wasn't really until I came home that I could see how it had been reported. My approach going into MasterChef was always to be honest and have integrity. The reporter was talking to everybody about cooking for the Dalai Lama and when she asked me why didn't you call him 'your holiness', I explained that to her. I wasn't aware that was going to be the feature of the story in the newspaper.

Has the experience opened up more opportunities to share your faith? If so, do you have any memorable experiences?

There are so many. The biggest ones are received afterwards. I go in to an event



Photo: Kate Bracks

and I come out so I don't necessarily see the long-term effects of how God works.

In 2012, I did an event for City Bible Forum in Adelaide and I spoke openly about my faith. They asked me back to Adelaide last year for another event. The organisers advised me about a person who had come along to the first event as a non-Christian and had since become a Christian through God's work and is now bringing a group of their non-Christian friends along. For me, this type of thing sticks in mind as memorable because I can see that God is working through the experiences that I have, and this encourages me to keep on using the opportunities He provides.

What is the biggest challenge in your Christian walk?

I spend a lot of time teaching people about God, particularly kids. I help in Bible study groups and speak at some Christian events. So, I find I do a lot of talking about God and it's a real discipline to actually sit and relate to God. The biggest challenge for me is taking the time each day to remember that I'm His child and not just constantly doing things for God. A Christian walk is more about relating to God. It's great to do good things, but it comes down to a relationship with God, and I have to constantly remind myself of that – it's not about what I do, it's about being God's child.

What do you do to maintain your own personal health, spirituality and wellbeing?

I find this a real challenge because life is still very busy, though not quite as frantic as it was in the first year after MasterChef. I have three children, work and travel, so I find it a discipline to make myself stop and sit and read the Bible, not for any other purpose other than to just hear God speak and to pray. I find myself praying a lot on the run or in the car, but to actually stop and sit is really important for maintaining personal health, wellbeing and the right perspective on things. It's not until I stop and think, and spend time focusing on God's Word that I can see the right perspective and make changes.

What is on the horizon for you and what are your aspirations for the future?

As for any Christian, it's just to try and take the opportunities that God gives and to use the abilities and skills He has given me to make the most of those opportunities. One of the beauties of life is that we never really know what the future holds or what's around the corner, so my hope is to continue to take the opportunities regardless of how scary they may seem, but if they present themselves, take them, and see what God will do with them.