

Prologue

I was absolutely terrified.

In fact, I was so scared that for about two and a half days I spent a great deal of the time in my hotel room either hugging the toilet and vomiting or lying in bed and moaning with a throbbing migraine headache. I was literally almost paralyzed with fear. I had no idea, however, that I was about to live out one of the most amazing and life-changing experiences I would ever know.

I was frightened, and I was clueless.

It had all begun about three days earlier. I was a college student at Murray State University in Kentucky and had flown out West to Phoenix, Arizona, for a conference with my campus pastor, Mark Randall. We arrived a few days early, rented a beautiful silver convertible, and headed off to Las Vegas for what I thought would be a few days of relaxing and sightseeing. I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

On the way up Highway 93 from Phoenix to Vegas, we stopped at Hoover Dam, and I can vividly remember standing against a guard rail looking at that amazing structure and feeling very small. It was about that time that Mark casually remarked, *“I can’t wait to get out there in Vegas and start witnessing on the strip.”* It may have been precisely that moment that my head began to hurt. Had I heard him correctly? Witnessing in Vegas? On the streets? What about seeing the sights, eating steak and lobster, watching shows? Surely I had misheard him. Either way, it did cross my mind that jumping the guard rail, falling from a great height, and having my frail body dashed on the concrete at the bottom of the dam seemed like a pretty reasonable and attractive alternative. The concept of any kind of public witnessing in such a wild place was just about too much for me. I am not sure how I managed to get back in the car with him. I thought to myself, *“Maybe I should start hitchhiking home.”*

A few miles later we topped a hill and I saw, for the first time, Vegas in all of its glory. Even at night from miles away, the millions and millions of lights from the strip lit up the sky as though a section of Vegas had twenty-four hours of daylight. It was glorious, brilliant, mind-blowing, and just plain intimidating. In the back of my head was a voice, saying, *“Get out while you can; it’s not too late.”*

Cruising the strip only made things worse. What I had thought were millions of lights turned into what seemed like billions. There were marquees vying for the attention of anyone passing by, restaurants offering ridiculously low prices in the hope that once diners were inside they would gamble, and thousands of people everywhere, most of whom

could accurately be described as “shady.” There were men passing out literature that no Christian should want to view. There were women who were scantily clad and doing what they could to attract men’s attention. There were security guards who looked like they would much rather beat people up than protect them. The place was flat-out wild, and I was flat-out petrified. Mark was excited. I was ready to cower in the hotel room.

The truth is, I really wanted to reach out to people. I loved Jesus, and I desperately wanted other people to love Him, too. I knew that part of being a Christian and wholeheartedly serving Jesus meant sharing His love with others. I also knew that His love was to be shared with all people, of all kinds, in all places, and that included the strip of Las Vegas. I just had no idea what to do. I had no idea what to expect, no idea how to reach those people effectively, and no idea how they would react. As much as I knew I wanted to reach out to them, and as much as I knew that God actually expected me to reach out to them, I was still terrified because of all of my questions: *How do I do it? Why should I do it? What will happen to me? Will my efforts really matter?* I had more questions than I had answers.

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I believe most Christians feel the same way. They have an overwhelming number of questions and concerns about evangelism. They know they should reach out, and, deep down, they really want to, but they don’t know how, and they don’t know what to expect. They feel unequipped, unmotivated, unworthy, and incapable. The goal of this book is to

change all of that. My prayer is that those who read it will be greatly motivated to reach our world, and specifically their personal sphere of influence, with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. Whether you currently are confident about sharing your faith or are as terrified as I was, my desire is that this book will be a great resource for you and will assist you in reaching the world around you. I pray that it will motivate you, challenge you, stretch you, equip you, and ultimately send you out into the world with the unbelievable message that Jesus is alive and changing lives today.

So, how did my story end?

I have heard my friend Mark referred to as the “John Wayne” of evangelism, and from my experiences on that trip, I can see why. Both nights (while I stayed in the room throwing up and moaning) he would go out on the strip of Vegas and share Jesus with people. Eventually, after much deliberation, praying, worrying, and downright pleading with God, I decided that I would at least go down on the strip and watch him. I wasn't quite ready to be involved, but I eventually talked myself into standing at a distance and watching Mark do his thing.

There were dozens of men, as I mentioned earlier, standing on the street corners handing out literature about where to find a prostitute or a strip club. Mark would walk out on the streets, stand nearly shoulder to shoulder with a group of them, and begin handing out Gospel literature, all the while saying things to passersby such as, *“You don't need what they are handing out. This is what you need. It's about Jesus, the King of Kings, and the*

Lord of Lords.” I’ll admit, I thought he was a little bit crazy, and I wasn’t the only one. The guys passing out literature must have thought he was a bit off his nut as well. They were mad. They cussed him, they made up lies about the legalities of handing out literature on the strip, they made fun of him, and they mocked him. It was ugly . . . at first.

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Mark stood his ground, and I was compelled. I kept moving closer and closer, mostly just trying to hear the conversations. Before I knew it, I was standing next to Mark, also handing out Gospel tracts, and also engaging these men in conversation. Once I overcame my initial fear, the whole experience became amazing. Over the three or four hours that we stood there, the atmosphere changed. The men eventually began asking us questions such as, *“Why are you doing this stuff, anyway?”* We would reply something along the lines of, *“To let you and all these people know that Jesus loves you and can change your lives.”* We showed them a firm love that night, and it didn’t take very long until they began to warm up to us. They began to “forget” to pass out their literature and instead engaged us in conversation. When we would challenge them that there was a better life than promoting prostitution, they would respond by saying, *“I know, but I gotta have a job. It pays the bills,”* to which we would respond, *“God could give you a better job.”* We explained that if they would put their faith in Him and trust Him, He would meet their needs.

I couldn’t believe the change in attitude that came over those men. Perhaps even more incredible was the fact that something was changing

in me. I was excited. Actually, I was beyond excited – I was ecstatic. I was having an absolute blast. It was wonderful.

After several hours of passing out tracts and talking with these men, we decided it was time to go. When we announced we were leaving, one of the men actually began to get tears in his eyes and said gently, “*Will you be back tomorrow?*” Even more amazing than that was the fact that none of his friends ridiculed him for this but instead looked to us expectantly, hoping we had plans to return. Another of the men pulled us aside privately and asked if we could give him a ride home. We agreed. On the way, he pulled out a Gideon’s New Testament from his coat. He said he always carried it with him. He confessed that he had been raised in church and knew a lot about the Bible, but had walked away from God and knew that he needed to recommit his life to Jesus. We were able to challenge him to live for Jesus, and, before we dropped him off, we were privileged to pray with him. He thanked us repeatedly.

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I am convinced that at least some of those men were different after that night. For some of them, it may have been the first time that anyone ever loved them enough to challenge them and confront them. Some of them may have heard truth that really shook them up. At least one man was reminded of a time earlier in life when he was interested in following Jesus, and we challenged him to return to that mind frame. But, as much as it may have impacted those men, I am convinced that it

impacted me more. I have never been the same. From that day forward, my life took on an entirely new purpose. There is no doubt whatsoever that it was one of the most pivotal moments of my entire life.

For thirteen years now I have dedicated my life to reaching out to people with the Gospel of Jesus. I have shared Jesus with my friends and family and with students at universities from Ohio State to Harvard. I have shared with people online, people on buses, people on planes, and people on trains. I have shared Jesus with Buddhists, Muslims, Taoists, atheists, and Bible-belters. I have shared Jesus from L.A. to Toronto, and from Trinidad to Thailand. It has been an absolutely amazing adventure. My goal is to challenge you to make sharing the Gospel of Jesus your lifelong adventure as well. I am convinced that sharing this message is man's highest destiny, and I will do my best to convince you of that. I am not necessarily going to challenge you to witness on the streets of Vegas, but I am going to challenge you, in the name of Jesus, to do something – anything – to reach this world with our perfect message of hope.

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John Wayne (the real John Wayne, not my friend) once said, "*Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway.*" I relate my story to you to let you know that I was once scared terribly. I had no clue what to do, what to say, how to say it, or even why I should say it. Over the years, I have been changed, equipped, and motivated, and I believe that you can be too. Are you willing? You may not know what to do. You may not

feel confident. You, too, may be completely terrified. Are you willing to “saddle up” anyway? I challenge you to take the content of this book, pull out your Bible, a pen, and a notebook, and begin to learn the answers to many of the questions you may have about sharing Jesus.

With that said, please do both of us a favor as you read and study: Don't skip the Bible verses. Many Christians today, especially those who are very familiar with the Bible, have a tendency to skim over, or skip entirely, passages of scripture when they read Christian books. Please don't do this. Instead, when you see passages of scripture, give special attention to them. Take the time to meditate on them and think them through. Be sure that the points I am making really do line up with the Word of God. Ultimately it will not be my words or ideas that will change you, but rather the *“living and enduring Word of God”* (1 Peter 1:23).

To reiterate this point: Don't skip the Bible verses, don't skip the Bible verses, and don't skip the Bible verses.

Ok. Are you ready? Go to the first chapter and let's “saddle up.”

Note: If you are not currently a follower of Jesus, I strongly recommend first reading chapters 20 – 22 concerning the identity of Jesus, and chapters 12 & 13 concerning the message of Jesus before beginning Chapter 1.