

Sharing Hope

True Stories



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In the stories told throughout the book, all names have been changed.

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“I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD,
the deeds for which He is to be praised,
according to all the LORD has done for us.”

Isaiah 63:7

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Introduction

Have you ever been in the dark and experienced someone shine a flashlight in your face? What was your response?

It's human nature to recoil.

Now picture hiking in the dark when clouds block the moon and seeing in the distance a faint light glowing. As you draw near the light gradually increases. How would you feel if you were lost?

When light is gradually increased, there is beauty and can it ever draw you in.

I love to rise early, hop on my Elliptigo and get my day off to an active start as I ride around the neighborhood. As the sun's first rays peek over the horizon I am reminded of Proverbs 4:18, "The way of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day, but the way of the wicked is like deep darkness. They do not know what makes them stumble."

As someone who spent the first eighteen years of her life stumbling and clueless, this is one reason I've found the gospel to be good news. Yet if I oversleep and don't get outside until the light of the sun shines straight into my eyes, the same sun that illuminates my way can also be unpleasant.

I love how John the Baptist's dad prophesied,

“And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”
(Luke 1: 76-79, NIV)

Isn't it neat to think of Jesus being like a rising sun and God sending someone to go before him so we aren't blinded by the light?

That's one thing I love about reaching out relationally. We have opportunity, like John the Baptist, to join in with Jesus as His light dawns in people's hearts.

I am often asked how to do this. “How can I initiate a conversation with someone about Jesus?” In this book I've shared thirty stories to illustrate different ways this has looked in my life. There isn't a formula. It's more like an adventure. I never know where a conversation may go or often if there even will be one.

On my last flight the woman next to me popped earphones in and started watching a movie right after she sat down. So much for engaging. But I told Jesus I was willing to share if He provided a way. At the end of the flight, she started to freak out and her friend was trying to calm her. The thought came to mind to share with her Isaiah 41:10 but I wrestled, “Lord, she didn't even want to talk with me, and you want me to dive in and share a verse with her. Won't that seem odd?” But I told him I was willing if he provided a way. When I asked if she'd like me to share a verse that helps me when flying she eagerly nodded. After I shared Isaiah 41:10 she was so appreciative. When I heard she had a second flight to go, I asked if she'd like me to write the verse down. So I did and drew her a picture of God's hand holding the plane and her. It wasn't a very good picture, but she clasped it to her

chest and said, “I am going to show this to my dad. He will love this.” When I asked if her dad struggled with flight anxiety, she smiled. “No, but he’s a fan of God. He is going to love you shared this with me.”

I bet he’s been praying! I hope one day in heaven I get to hear the rest of the story.

Sow broadly. Trust Jesus. Even with my failures. And yes, there have been many of those. You will have opportunity to read some of them in here. This is something I am still growing in.

Even so, sharing Jesus is becoming a way of life that has enhanced my life and opened so many opportunities for me to experience Jesus, especially when I cry out to him for help, wisdom and words.

Jesus made it clear, apart from me you can do nothing. That is especially true in reaching out to friends, family, and people around us who do not yet know Jesus. But when we do this with Jesus what a difference that can make and not only in the lives of those we share Him with.

Truly, sharing Jesus, while partnering with Jesus, makes for amazing adventures!

Chapter One

In The Beginning...

I became a Christian my first week at The University of Florida. When the Lord rescued me from the dominion of darkness and brought me into the kingdom of the Son He loved, the difference was incredible.

Not only did I have a huge hunger for His Word, but I wanted to share about Him with anyone who'd listen.

Well, almost . . .

The first assignment in my public speaking class was to talk about ourselves for five minutes. As I prepared that speech, I sensed the Lord wanted me to share what had recently happened to me. I was scared.

I was the youngest in a class composed of upperclassmen. The guy next to me was 25 years old. To this 18-year-old that seemed ancient.

The Lord kept tugging at my heart, affirming this was something He wanted me to do. But still, I struggled.

Then on Sunday my public speaking teacher not only showed up at the church I was visiting, but she also sat in the row in front of me. Did that ever fortify my heart.

So, I did it. I shared my story of coming to know Jesus.

It was probably the worst testimony ever. I bumbled and stumbled. I wasn't all that certain exactly what happened to me, so I'm sure whatever I shared was a bit fuzzy.

But God poured on the grace. A number of those upper-class students approached me afterward, affirming me for sharing so openly about something "so personal."

It wasn't all that bad, I thought.

Sharing my story enabled me to identify with Christ, letting people around me know there was a reason for the hope I had inside, and opened the door to share more later with new friends in class.

I am so thankful I followed Jesus in telling my story.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. Have you ever struggled to share your story? Why or why not? What happened as a result?
3. **Read Mark 5:18-20.** What did the man want to do? What did Jesus ask him to do?
4. What do you think that was like for him? (If you have time, you can read the context of this story in Mark 5:1-20)
5. How much did he need to know to do what Jesus asked him

to do?

6. How does His story connect with your story?

Chapter Two

Event or Process?

When you learned I became a Christian during my first week at the University of Florida, what came to mind?

Did you think, *wow she must've met someone who was great at explaining the gospel? Or I wonder what gospel illustration they used?*

What if I tell you no one at UF shared a gospel illustration with me? The story didn't begin there.

It began nearly two hundred years before I was born. You see, I am the great, great, great, great-granddaughter of a pirate. Only he wasn't cool like Johnny Depp. He didn't leave a treasure chest of gold, but a legacy of alcoholism, abuse, and adultery that was passed down from generation to generation. When my dad was 16, his dad, who was a physically and verbally abusive alcoholic, was unfaithful to my grandma and divorced her.

My mom's dad was also an alcoholic who was unfaithful to her mom. After they divorced and he lost everything, he took his life by jumping off a bridge.

When my parents met, they agreed, "We know the pain of divorce. We never want to do that."

My dad was an artist. On weekends we went to art shows, where he sold his work. We didn't have a lot of money. We never knew whether our ancient van would start or not. We nicknamed it Van Gogh.

By the time I was eight, my parents were struggling in their marriage. Then my dad was invited to a retreat where the gospel was shared. He went to heckle. But Jesus got my dad.

The next month my mom went to the retreat for women and her life was changed too. Our home went from darkness to light. I had no doubt God existed.

My parents excitedly shared the gospel with me, but what I heard at age eight was, "Dad's going to heaven, Mom's going to heaven. If you pray this prayer you too can go to heaven. Don't you want to go to heaven?"

Of course. So, I prayed the prayer. But I had no idea I was a sinner. No sense of needing Jesus. In fact, I remember sitting on my bed and telling God, "You are so fortunate to have me on your team."

Fast forward a few years. I am now in confirmation class and the teacher asks, "How many of you, if you were to die tonight, know for sure you'd go to heaven?"

My hand shot up. I prayed the prayer when I was eight. But then I looked around. No one else's hand was up. If it was so easy why wasn't anyone else's hand up?

I began to wonder. I know God exists. But does He really want a personal relationship with us, or did He leave us here to do the best we can while He goes off and does other things, like run the universe?

A few weeks later at youth group, I heard a message on not being unequally yoked with unbelievers and the speaker exclaimed, "If you never date a non-Christian, you'll never marry one."

I decided to make a deal with God. "You keep a steady stream of Christian guys coming my way and I won't date any non-Christians."

It didn't take long until I'd dated and broken up with all the Christian guys I knew who I considered datable.

For the next three years, I turned down dates from guys who weren't Christian and waited.

At the start of my senior year, our church split over a doctrinal issue. I saw people who sang "Blessed be the tie that binds" every Sunday act hatefully to each other. I concluded, "I think the Bible is a good book but it's not livable."

Then a friend told me, "You know, people are starting to say you're stuck up because you won't date anyone."

I told God, "That's it. I kept my part of the bargain, but you obviously didn't keep Yours. I don't think You care about me." And I walked away.

In my senior year of high school, I desperately searched for the meaning of life. I threw myself into existentialism—only to discover at its extreme, it leads to suicide. Next, I looked to achievements for meaning. I'd been hosting a television show for two years. One night, after winning an award, I discovered how empty that is.

I desperately wanted to know what was real. What could I give my life to?

My favorite teacher loved to read and gave me books after she finished them. They were all literary pornography. Then she shared the tenets of feminism and I read, "A woman should be able to have sex with a man without a relationship just like men have with women." I thought, *I can test that out.*

I knew a baseball player who was more than willing to comply. So, we headed out one night and it was getting hot and heavy in the front seat of his car. His radio blared hard rock.

Now, I'm more of a classical girl. Music was big in our home. I loved the beauty, the romance of classics. I really was not enjoying this hard

rock encounter. Suddenly the song “Highway to Hell” comes on and I thought, *What am I doing?* I pulled away. “Take me home.”

The guy was confused. “Wait, what? What did I do?.” But thankfully he complied.

By the time I graduated, I was depressed. Was there really no meaning to life?

I’d been planning on attending Emerson College in Boston, one of the top schools for broadcast journalism in the country. It was expensive. After visiting the campus, I decided I didn’t want to go there and waste my parents’ money since I hadn’t figured out life yet.

My parents said if I stayed home for college, they would give me a car.

I decided to work two jobs that summer so I wouldn’t have to think. During the day I had a PR internship at Miami International Airport. At night I worked at a department store. No one goes shopping at night in the summer in Miami. I don’t think I could’ve found a more boring job. The only fun was flirting with the security guards.

Every night they invited me to go with them to the bar across the street after work. Toward the end of the summer, I started to think maybe a relationship would give meaning to my life. I told another salesgirl, “Tonight I’m going to go out with John.”

She exclaimed, “You do know he is married?”

I had no idea. All summer he had flirted with me. Then I thought, *A guy would have to think you were pretty special to want to cheat on his wife to be with you.* From all those books I’d been reading my thinking was really messed up.

But I didn’t end up going that night. My parents had been praying like crazy. I’d grown up with my dad asking, “Honey would you help me review my Scripture memory verses?” He’d hand me cards with

verses on them. “Romans 3:23. ‘All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’ Romans 6:23 ‘For the wages of sin is death. . . .’”

“Great job, Dad.” I’d say as I handed the cards back to him. I was blind as a bat to their meaning. But those prayers my parents prayed were having an impact.

The next morning, when I woke the first thought in my mind was, *What am I thinking? That is a dead-end relationship. And I am totally stuck here. I always said I’d never stay at home for college.*

At breakfast, I announced I’d decided to attend the University of Florida. It was my dad’s alma mater and he made me apply as a back-up, so I’d already been accepted. But it was two weeks before school started, and all the dorms were full.

As my parents loaded the car to head to Gainesville to search for housing my mom asked, “Honey, what would you think about having a Christian for a roommate?”

I figured a Christian wouldn’t come home vomiting from drinking too much or make our place stink smoking weed or kick me out to be with her boyfriend. “That’d be ok, I guess.”

When we got to Gainesville, we were not having much luck finding housing. Apart from the University, there wasn’t much to Gainesville back in 1982. But then my parents came back to the car excited, “We just learned of a scholarship house for Christian students.”

As we headed there, I grumbled, “I said I’d live with one Christian not a whole houseful of them.”

My mom said, “Let’s just look and see.”

We pulled up in front of an old Victorian house two blocks from campus. I love old homes. And since I wouldn’t have a car, the distance was perfect. As I stepped in the front door, I felt peace. The turmoil inside disappeared.

Then I learned it only cost eighty dollars a month, which included meals. They even had a washer and a dryer. I wanted to live there.

When they ask if I was a Christian, I replied, “Prayed the prayer when I was eight.”

They invited me to move in.

A week later I did. Now this was in the days before personal computers. Everyone came to campus a week early because you literally had to run from building to building to put together your schedule. Drop/Add consisted of a long list where they manually wrote down and crossed out names.

There was another scholarship house next door for guys. Every resident was assigned weekly chores, and everyone ate meals together. The guys next door were involved with a Christian group on campus called The Navigators.

At dinner the first night one of the guys asked, “Is there anything we can pray for?” One of my new roommates replied, “You can pray for me. I have to get this class to graduate and there are three hundred people on the waitlist ahead of me.”

The guys prayed and the next night she returned with an amazing story of how she got the class. That caught my attention. *God cares about classes?*

Then the guys asked, “Is there anything else we can pray for?” Another new housemate shared an impossible request. They prayed and the next night she had a story of how God answered.

This happened every single night that week.

On Friday after dinner, I headed up to my room and got down on my knees, “If it’s true. If You really want a personal relationship with me, I want You.”

By this time there was no doubt in my mind I was a sinner. Everything I’d ever heard about the gospel clicked. I had a physical sensation

of being cleansed from the top of my head all the way to my feet. When I opened my Bible, I was shocked. It made sense.

People need to know about this.

For the first time, I had total assurance I belonged to Jesus. I can't begin to count the number of times I'd walked the aisle growing up "just in case."

But now I knew without a doubt I was a new creation in Christ.

I became a Christian my first week at the University of Florida. But God was at work long before I prayed the prayer. Evangelism wasn't a one-time event, but a process. When I saw the Engel Scale did this ever help me understand. This scale was created by a professor at Wheaton College to help people become more aware of the steps that can be involved in someone coming to know Jesus.

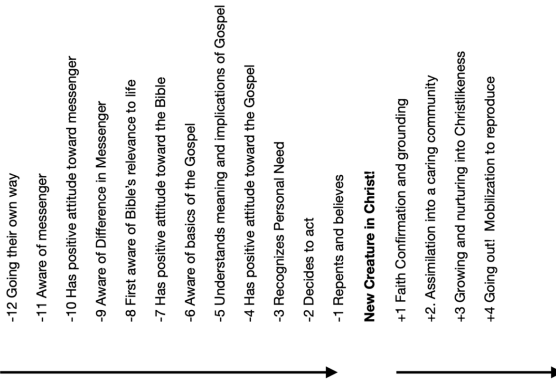
God was at work before I ever headed to campus.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?

1. The Engel Scale is represents how discovering God is a journey rather than an event. It is a model not a formula. It was not created to imply everyone comes to Christ in one set way. A person may move forward multiple steps in one encounter. Sometimes it may take years, even decades for a person to move from one step to the next. I find it especially helpful when praying for friends who don't know Jesus as well as to celebrate and give thanks to the Lord for steps forward friends do make.

ENGEL SCALE



SOURCE: Jim Peterson's Living Proof, discussion guide by K. C. Hinckley, NavPress, 1990

How does your story relate to the Engle Scale?

3. **Read John 9:1-41.** How did this man come to Jesus? According to Jesus in John 9:2, when did this process begin?

4. What opportunity did he have for sharing his story? What did he have to know to share his story?

5. How does His story relate to your story?

Chapter Three

What Must You Leave Behind?

“E xcusez moi. Could you help?”

I looked to my right. A petite brunette sat on the grass; a summer course schedule spread before her—not an uncommon sight the first day of classes at Florida State in 1984. What was uncommon was her accent.

“I do not understand . . .” She waved her hand over the newspaper, explaining she was an international student from France, looking for an elective class.

After showing her how to navigate the schedule, I continued to the library, my backpack loaded. I needed to write.

Throughout my sophomore year, I’d taken graduate-level creative writing courses where the instructor required publication to receive an A. After two semesters of B+, I was determined to finish the children’s book I was writing. Four hours of writing every day for a month should do the trick.

Stepping through the sliding glass doors into the first-floor stacks, I heard a voice inside my head. (I realize that sounds strange but it was clear as anything.) “Look around, Deb. Do you really think the world needs one more book?” Glancing around, I noted the first floor of the library was packed with books from floor to ceiling.

“Maybe not . . .?” I answered.

“I don’t want you to write. I want you to go back outside and spend time with that student.”

“But what if she’s not there?” I protested.

“She will be if you go now.”

I headed back outside and saw her gathering her things. She stood to leave as I approached. “Did you find a class?” I asked.

“Yes. I am going to take Introduction to the Old Testament.”

“Really?” I quickly decided to join her. “I’m taking that, too.”

“You are?” She was thrilled.

“I’m Carol,” she offered as we walked to the class, which was scheduled to start in 15 minutes. I’d only been a Christian a year and a half so I was guessing this would be interesting.

The class was terrible. For two hours the instructor explained away miracles, droned on about theories regarding who wrote the Bible, and debunked the “myth” that God exists. Meanwhile, I was talking to Him.

I recently discovered James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask of God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him.” So I started to pray.

Oh, Lord. What is up with this class? I so need wisdom. It’s obvious You’re up to something, but this is crazy. How do you want me to join in with what you’re doing?

As soon as class ended, Carol leaned over. “I could not understand a word he said. Would you tell me about the Old Testament?”

So, I did. For two hours each weekday we attended class, where neither of us understood much—she because of language difficulties, me because the content was so bizarre. I spent most of the two hours in class reading stories in the Old Testament, so I'd be ready to tell them afterward.

As soon as each class concluded, I spent the next two hours sharing stories from the Old Testament with Carol, then dialoguing with her about them. She was auditing the course, so she didn't need to take exams. Thankfully, there was no need to repeat the instructor's crazy theories.

On the last day of the month, she asked, "So how does Jesus fit into all this?" After hearing an overview of the stories in the Old Testament and learning about the system of sacrifice, Jesus made perfect sense.

When I finished telling her about Him, she asked, "Can I pray now to receive Him as my Savior?"

I knew then, helping women come to know Jesus is what I want to spend my life doing.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. What needed to be left behind to join Jesus in reaching out? What do you think that was like?
3. **Read Matthew 4:18-25.** In this passage, who follows Jesus?
4. What was the difference between the two sets of brothers and the large crowd?
5. According to Matthew 4:19, what is Jesus' responsibility and

what is ours?

6. Have you ever had to leave anything behind to follow Jesus?
If so, what did that look like?

7. Is there anything you sense the Lord is calling you to leave behind so you can follow Him?

Chapter Four

Fizzled Failures?

I stepped on the scale and groaned. “Freshman fifteen is no joke.”

When I met Marissa, a senior involved with CRU, we discovered we both loved to dance. As we connected, an idea was born.

“Hey. What if we offered aerobic dance classes in a dorm for free? That could be a great way to reach out.”

And, I thought, to lose weight. “I’m in.”

We posted fliers announcing that the class would be held twice a week at 9 am in the basement of North Hall. Marissa would teach Tuesdays. I agreed to take Thursdays.

This was the ‘80s. I arrived sporting a bright pink leotard, purple tights, yellow headband, and leg warmers, lugging a cassette player.

One girl came. I recognized her. She was in my Introduction to Speech Disorders class. Sweat poured down as we moved to the music, not only because we were dancing. The basement was not air-conditioned. As we shook, lunged, and twirled, I prayed she would come to know Jesus.

Weeks went by. Christine was the only one coming. One Thursday a new friend asked after class, “Want to get some yogurt?” I was sup-

posed to go teach aerobics but figured this was still reaching out. And frozen yogurt sounded better than sweating.

The next Wednesday, I ran into Marissa. “Christine said you weren’t there Thursday?”

I mumble some excuse, and Marissa pressed in. “Deb, we said we’d be there. Even if it’s just one person, she is counting on us. And you never know when God might bring someone else. It’s important that we do what we say we’re going to do. Remember, we are doing this to reach out. What kind of picture are we giving of the God we follow if they have no idea whether we’ll do what we say we’ll do or not?”

Ouch. Point taken. I don’t miss another Thursday. But then Christine stops coming. Soon, the whole thing fizzles.

Oh well, at least we tried.

Fast forward seven years. By this time, I was married and seven months pregnant, heading into my first Lamaze class.

As Jim and I walked in, I gasped. On the other side of the room sat Christine. The one girl who came to the aerobics class my freshman year. The one I prayed for.

Later that week I ran into her in the grocery store. She’d already given birth once but had such a difficult experience that she decided to take Lamaze again.

As we talked, we discovered not only did we live near each other, we both loved to cook.

“Any chance you’d like to get together once a month to cook our way around the world?” I asked.

She was excited. Starting with Armenia, we created meals from countries beginning with every letter of the alphabet.

After we had our babies and cooked our way through Germany (our seventh month and country), Jim and I started a Bible study for married couples and they eagerly joined us.

Want to guess who eventually became believers? Christine and her husband. Eight years after our first meeting in that sweaty dorm basement.

You never know what our Almighty God might do with fizzled failures.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. Have you ever experienced failure in your attempts to share Jesus with others around you? What did that look like? How did you feel?
3. **Read Romans 8:28.** How does the truth of this passage relate to our failures?
4. How does it relate to your story?
5. What thoughts come to mind as you consider this?
6. What impact can knowing this have on you as you seek to share the reason for the hope you have?

Chapter Five

Without Love...

I was in the senior honors program, active in Navigators, and meeting with women every day to help them grow in their relationship with God, while also dating Jim. I was struggling to keep up with my coursework.

When a huge paper was due the Monday after the Navigator Fall conference, I knew I couldn't do both. I prayed and sensed the Lord leading me to focus on the paper. After I turned it in, I asked friends who attended the conference to share their highlights with me.

"Oh, Deb. You won't believe how amazing the conference was. We learned so many new ways to share Jesus with people."

One friend told me about a guy who walked up to people during his lunch hour and asked, "Do you know that Jesus loves you?" She shared story after story of people who came to know the Lord after he initiated using this question.

I smiled. *I can do this.*

Later that day, as I walked across campus, I saw a woman headed toward me on the same path. As she drew near, I smiled and waved. She smiled back. I said, "Do you know that Jesus loves you?"

She stopped in her tracks, her eyes widened, then became steely. Her face morphed into stone. “I hope you know you ruined my day.”

I was shocked, frozen, and unable to think of a thing to say.

Scowling, she stormed off. Even though I never saw her again, I felt horrible.

How could words so beautiful to me, bring someone pain?

Words that worked so well for the guy from the conference totally backfired for me. How? Why?

A while later I read 1 Corinthians 13:1 “Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels but have not love I am a resounding gong or banging cymbal.”

And I knew I was busted.

I’d been trying out a new technique. I wasn’t viewing that woman as a person. There was no love in my approach. I hadn’t prayed for her or asked the Lord if He wanted me to say something to her. And without love, the message was not well received.

The right words—even beautiful, potentially life-giving words—without love were worth nothing. Worse, they brought pain.

I never tried that approach again. Though I wonder, what might happen if they were said in love? I’m guessing that’s how the gentleman who used this approach proceeded.

Maybe I should try again?

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. Have you ever tried to share the gospel without love? What happened?
3. **Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.** According to this passage,

what happens if we try to share Jesus with people without love?

4. Consider an evangelism version of this passage:

“If I am the world’s best communicator, always knowing exactly what I should say and saying it in a persuasive, engaging way but don’t have love I am like a noisy gong irritating those who hear. If I know how to answer every single question people have and can reason and defend the gospel against any argument and will step out trusting God to do crazy big things but don’t have love, it’s all worth a big zero. Even if I am generous giving everything away and willing to sacrifice to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, going without food, sleep, safety, enduring harsh conditions, but if I don’t have love, I will experience no eternal value from it.”

Jerry Bridges once had us take out a sheet of paper and write a bunch of zeros on the back of it. Then he asked, “How much is that number worth?” It didn’t matter if someone had a hundred zeros or only one; they were all worth nothing.

But then he told us to put a one to the left of our zeros and asked, “Now what is it worth?”

Love is like that one. It gives value to everything else. The person who has one zero with a one to the left of it has more than the person who has hundreds of zeros with no “one.”

Tears streamed down my face as I heard him share this.

Remember, Love is a person. (1 John 4:8).

5. What might it look like for you to share the gospel with Love?

Chapter Six

Hindered By Pride

My friends who attended the Navigator Fall conference also told me about another speaker who read the Bible with friends who didn't know Jesus. "You read a chapter of John together, then discuss it. He says people are off-the-charts eager to do this."

The more I listened the more excited I became. *I could do that.*

I had three good friends in the anthropology department. We took most of our classes together and studied together. I loved them dearly. The next day after class I asked, "Would you guys like to get together to read the Bible and discuss it?"

All three said yes.

Preparing for our first meeting, I turned to the gospel of John and read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

I had no clue what that verse meant so figured I better start somewhere else.

I'd heard people use Romans Road to share the gospel, so I decided to start with that book.

When Kathryn, Amy, and Larissa arrived at my dorm room, I handed them each a Bible. "Let's turn to the book of Romans." I helped them find it, then suggested, "How about we read the first chapter? We can each read a paragraph and after we finish reading this first chapter we can discuss it."

They were all in until we read Romans 1:24, "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator. . ."

Kathryn slammed the Bible shut. "I don't believe this. You don't have to believe this to be a Christian." Kathryn claimed to be a Christian but was living with her boyfriend. She stood up to leave.

Oh no. All three women were sexually active. *I should have thought this through.*

Amy shook her head. "I think I like Kathryn's version of Christianity better than yours."

As she stood, Larissa also rose. "I'm with them."

All three walked out. I hadn't even said anything about the passage.

I stayed friends with all three of them. But we never again met to read the Bible.

You better believe I went back to the friend who attended that conference and asked, "Could you please explain John 1:1 to me?"

Turns out one of the speakers, Jim Peterson, wrote an entire guide for using John containing great questions and explanations. (To find it online google Jim Peterson 24 hours with John pdf) What a help that proved to be. I should've asked for help right away, but I didn't want to appear ignorant.

Pride really does go before a fall.

I've since learned you don't have to know a lot to reach out. Consider how Jesus told the former demoniac from whom He cast out legions of demons, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you." But reaching out to share hope is also a skill that can be developed.

Decades later I am still growing in my ability to give the reason for the hope I have. And yes, one of the key ways I learn and grow is through failure. Every failure is ripe with opportunity to grow . . . as long as I go back and dialogue with Jesus about it.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read Proverbs 16:18.** Has pride ever hindered you in your attempts to share the gospel? Or hindered you in growing in learning how to share the gospel?
3. What could help you keep growing in learning how to share the gospel? What could it look like practically for you to move forward in doing this?

Chapter Seven

Following Jesus

“**T**here’s this girl at the gym who keeps asking spiritual questions. Would you be willing to meet with her?” I’ve been meeting with Tina for two years helping her grow in her relationship with Jesus. Now she wants me to meet with someone else.

I’d only been married two months. I was not happy about leaving my new husband on a Saturday afternoon, but I do love helping people come to know Jesus.

“Alright,” I sighed. The three of us made plans to meet for lunch but I was not interested in wasting time.

As Lucinda bit into her burger, I jumped right in. “So Tina tells me you’re interested in spiritual things?”

Lucinda almost choked, “Um . . . yes.” She glanced around the restaurant and started picking at her food.

She told me she was a grad student studying nutrition. She lived with her boyfriend in Tallahassee on the weekends but drove to Gainesville for classes during the week. Recently they had a huge fight, and when she slammed her fist into the dashboard it broke both the dashboard and her hand.

“I need something in my life,” she confessed.

We agreed to meet on Wednesdays after I got off work. I invited Kelly, another student who wanted to be in a Bible study, to join us.

Each week we read a chapter of John and discussed it. Then Lucinda spent the next hour teaching us nutrition. I learned so much.

Five months in, Lucinda prayed to receive Christ. I was so excited.

But she was still spending every weekend with her boyfriend. I felt pressure to say something about sexual purity, but every time I began, I sensed the Lord commanded me not to. What was up with that?

We met all summer, reading a chapter of John each week and discussing it. (I find even after someone becomes a believer, continuing to discuss the gospel of John lays a solid foundation for their walk with God, so we keep going. I've observed those who make it through all 24 hours with John end up light years ahead of people who pray to receive Christ after only seeing an illustration. A solid foundation of knowing who Jesus is and really grasping the gospel as shared by John provides a powerful start in a new believer's life.)

Each week as Lucinda headed "home" to Tallahassee, I was on my knees praying, "Lord are you sure you don't want me to tell her what the Bible says about sex?"

Week after week, the Holy Spirit impressed on my heart to remain silent, patient, and pray.

In the meantime, Lucinda was growing, changing, and blossoming before my eyes. Even her boyfriend was taking note.

That fall, for Lucinda's birthday, they decided to head to North Carolina for a romantic weekend away. By this point, Lucinda was doing a nutrition internship at a local hospital. On Friday before they left town, I hosted a birthday party for her. Before people arrived, she pulled me aside.

"Deb. You won't believe what I learned today." Her internship was supervised by a dietician whose husband was a pastor. "Mary just

shared with me what the Bible says about sex. I had no idea. I'm going to have to tell Jermaine God's way is no sex outside of marriage."

And she did. On the way to North Carolina, she broke the news to him. After months of watching how she'd changed, he responded, "I respect that." They slept together all weekend in the same bed but didn't have sex.

On their last day in North Carolina, they were hiking when Jermaine said, "I just wish I could meet another engineer who decided to follow Christ." Right then a couple overtook them on the trail. As they started talking, they discovered the guy was an engineer who came to Christ through The Navigators. Shortly afterward Jermaine prayed to receive Christ.

Six months later, Lucinda and Jermaine married. I was so overcome by the wisdom of God and the beauty of what He'd done, I bawled through the entire ceremony. The Lord knew Lucinda needed time for her relationship with Him to grow before she could risk losing Jermaine to follow God's way. In the meantime, God was at work preparing Jermaine, too.

Truly there is more sin in all our lives than we ever realize. In His mercy God has a timing for revealing it to us. Wise is the discipler who follows His timing, for His timing is often not ours, but infinitely wiser and better.

The next year, Lucinda was out walking in her new neighborhood in Tallahassee when she met a neighbor who shared she was struggling. "There has to be more to life."

Lucinda touched her arm, and said, "I've felt that way. Would you like to hear what helped me?"

Want to guess who started reading the gospel of John with her neighbor and soon saw her come to Christ?

Thirty-four years later Lucinda is still investing in women around her. And her husband Jermaine became a teaching elder in his church. What a mighty God we serve.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read Isaiah 55:8-11.** How does this passage of Scripture relate to the story?
3. How does it relate to your story?
4. What difference can knowing Isaiah 55:8-9 make as you share the gospel with others around you?

Chapter Eight

Purposeful Weakness

She'd once been beautiful. Soft, fair skin; blonde hair; lively eyes, but her hands were anything but. In her thirties, she awoke one morning to find them swollen. When the swelling subsided, her fingers were twisted and contorted. By her fifties, she could barely use them. When we met, I couldn't bear to look at her hands.

Then I had a dream. In my dream, I saw those hands being held and caressed by the hands of the Lord. As He gently kissed her fingers He declared, "Do you see these hands? I love these hands. I made these hands. They are beautiful to me."

After that, I never struggled to look at Virginia's hands. In fact, she and I began partnering together, reaching out in the library where we worked. After my student assistant expressed interest in reading the Bible, Virginia and I decided to study the book of John and invite Melissa to join us.

What precious times we shared in Virginia's living room. We considered what we learned about the Lord from each passage and what

difference it could make in our lives. Virginia and I were learning so much. The Lord kept meeting us right where we were.

One night Melissa exclaimed, “I just don’t get it. I want to understand the Bible the way you do. I keep trying, but I can’t see what you see.”

That night my husband and I walked and prayed on campus. I cried out to the Lord, “You say in Your Word if anyone seeks Me with all their heart I will be found by them. Please be found by Melissa.

The next day Melissa told me she was sitting on her bed the night before trying to read her Bible when suddenly it made sense. She could understand it like never before. When I asked what time that happened, can you believe it was right when I cried out to the Lord?.

The angels in heaven weren’t the only ones rejoicing. Virginia’s gnarled hands (and mine!) were raised in praise, too.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What do you learn about growing in sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read Psalm 139:13-16.** How much care went into God’s creation of you?
3. God knew all the days ordained for you when he knit you together in your mother’s womb. How does this relate to his call to tell others about Him?
4. What difference can knowing Psalm 139:13-16 make as God prompts you to share Him with others around you?

Chapter Nine

Sweet Initiative

After two years of marriage, Jim and I purchased our first home. I was so excited to be part of a neighborhood. Yet day after day the people around us would come home, pull into their garage, and lower the door. We weren't finding opportunity to get to know anyone.

So one Saturday I spent the afternoon baking cookies. If no one was going to greet us, why not make our own sweet introductions?

Jim and I walked to each house, knocked on the door, introduced ourselves, then gave our new neighbors a plate full of cookies. They were surprised, but every single person took time to interact with us.

One couple was newly married and new to town. He was an anesthesiology resident, his wife a PA. They were close to our age and we connected. Soon they were coming over for dinner.

After Jim and I attended a Family Life Marriage Conference we decided to host a Bible study in our home for young couples who wanted to grow their marriage. We needed this.

When we invited Jorge and Fatima they decided to join too. Jorge had some church background, but this was all new for Fatima.

When Fatima became pregnant she told me, “I expect I’m having a girl. I once went to a tarot card reader and she said I’d have a daughter.”

I have never prayed so hard for anyone to have a son. Was I ever thrilled when she called after her first ultrasound and told me, “It’s a boy.”

Soon after that, she started following Jesus.

By the time we moved five years later everyone in that neighborhood was so close. We had progressive dinners where we’d go from house to house eating and enjoying each other’s company.

And to think it all began with a plate of cookies.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about growing in sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read Romans 2:4.** What role does kindness play in people coming to know the Lord?
3. What role can creative kindness play in our sharing of Jesus with others around us?

Chapter Ten

Trusting God's Timing

When I was nine months pregnant, I got down on my knees and prayed, “Lord, just because I’m becoming a mom doesn’t mean I want to stop joining in with what you are doing, discipling others. Would you please keep bringing opportunities, showing me how I can do this?”

Right then the phone rang. It was the aerobics instructor who’d been hired to take over the class I taught while I was on maternity leave.

“I noticed you used an Amy Grant song in class today. Are you a Christian?” She went on to tell me she was interested in learning more about God. When I asked if she’d like to read the Bible together, she jumped at the opportunity.

But my son was due the next day. So we decided not to set a time but to wait until after the baby was born.

Can you believe he was five days late?

In the whirlwind of adjusting to a new life, I never did get together with that instructor to read the Bible.

So my journey as a disciple-making mom began with failure. I learn a lot that way. It's by the grace of God I ever get anything right. But as I persevere, has the journey ever been worth it.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. Have you ever missed an opportunity to share Jesus with someone because you thought you wouldn't have time or the circumstances weren't right? What happened?
3. **Read Ephesians 5:16-17.** How might trusting God's sovereignty over time (as well as all the circumstances surrounding us) prove key for making the most of every opportunity to share Jesus with others?
4. How do these verses relate to your story?

Chapter Eleven

Opportunities While Waiting

As we waited in line to enter the harvest festival at our new church, I noticed a young mom in front of me. “Have you been to this before?” I ask.

She shakes her head, “First time ever doing this.”

I nod, “For me, too. We just moved to town.” As we continued talking, I learned she recently became a Christian.

I told her, “After I became a Christian, I started meeting with a woman who showed me a simple way to keep growing in knowing Jesus. It doesn’t take a lot of time but made a tremendous impact on my life. Would you like for me to show you what she showed me?”

Clara was totally game. So we exchanged numbers and the next week met in her living room to share a quiet time. I soon learned Clara came from a rough background and was on her fourth marriage. “There’s a Bible study on Loving Your Husband I’ve been wanting to do. Would you like to do it together?”

She said she’d love to.

Now Clara worked as a butcher at a local grocery store. Her best friend, the manager of the bakery, decided to join us. After we met she confessed to Clara that she'd been having an affair. Shortly afterward, she broke that off and became a Christian.

Next, a woman from the store deli joined us. Her husband was in prison. When he got out my husband started meeting with him, helping him get to know Jesus.

Then Clara started reaching out to a friend in the dairy department. Every week as I grocery shopped, I prayed up and down every aisle for every employee I passed. I prayed the gospel would spread. And it did.

Fresh herbs weren't the only thing growing at that grocery store. I met with Clara for seven years, helping her get established in her walk with the Lord. (It tends to take a lot longer once you leave college.) Today, more than thirty years later, she is still reaching out and investing in women around her.

It all began with a conversation initiated while waiting in a long line.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read John 4:35.** When you look around you do you see fields ripe for harvest?

Note: If you wonder what Jesus is talking about and how this relates to sharing hope, read John 4: What is the context for Jesus saying this?

3. How do these verses relate to your story?

Chapter Twelve

The Offer

Shortly after we moved to Venice, Florida, and start attending Venice Bible Church I told the church secretary, “If any women call the church who’d like to know more about Jesus, please feel free to give them my number.”

On the other side of town, a new mom was struggling. Robin was on her second marriage and had recently given birth to a son. A few years before, she fled a physically abusive relationship, leaving two daughters behind. She knew she needed help as she started a new family this second time around. Wondering if God might be the help she needed, she called a church near her home: Venice Bible Church.

Was the church secretary ever thankful to know someone she could contact.

She phoned me. “A woman just called the church and wants to know about God. Would you be willing to meet with her?”

Would I?. I was so excited as I gave Paula a call. Soon we were meeting weekly to read through the gospel of John. Just a few weeks in she entered into a relationship with Jesus. I was so rejoicing.

And I wondered why I never thought to contact a church secretary before. When people become interested in God they very well

may contact a church. I suspect many church secretaries have no idea whom to refer them to other than the pastor.

Am I ever thankful God gave me the idea to make this offer.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read Jeremiah 29:11-13.** What thoughts come to mind as you consider these words from the Lord?
3. How can knowing this impact your sharing the reason for the hope you have inside?
4. God is committed to making himself known when people seek him. What could it look like for you to take initiative to join in with what he is doing?

Chapter Thirteen

Hope Rekindled

When my son was five years old we moved across the street from a gruff World War II veteran. I loved to sit on his porch and talk with Ted and his wife.

I soon discovered Joanne was a believer but didn't go to church. What sweet times we shared together, especially praying for her husband (when he wasn't around). I couldn't imagine what my life would be like if I didn't have fellowship, so I would often take her a verse that stood out to me and bring him a plate of cookies.

My son loved to hear the stories Ted would tell.

When Ted was a teenager he ran away from home, hiding in rail cars as he traveled the country. Eventually, he worked for the railroad and lost half a finger when it was smashed between two cars.

After Pearl Harbor was bombed, he was drafted. I soon learned Ted might be gruff and rough on the outside, but he had the heart of a teddy bear.

One day when I was raking leaves in our front yard, Ted came over.

"I know I'm going to hell." he blurted.

Before I could reply he continued, "In the war a buddy and I were in a boat with Japanese prisoners. We knew if we fell asleep, they'd do us

in, and it was torture trying to stay awake, so we shot them and threw their bodies overboard. It was cold-blooded murder.”

No one ever found out. But the weight had been heavy on his soul for years.

Was I ever crying out to the Lord to know how to respond.

“Ted, did you know there’s a story in the Bible of a murderer who became a Christian? In fact, he murdered Christians before Jesus appeared to him and saved him. That’s the beauty of what Jesus did when He died on the cross. He died to pay the penalty for all sins, even murder. And that guy went on to write half the New Testament.”

I only wish you could’ve seen Ted’s face as hope rekindled. Not long after this, he surrendered his life to Jesus and was washed clean as snow.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. Have you ever met someone who didn’t have hope, who thought they were hopeless? How did you respond?
3. **Read 1 Peter 3:15.** What is the reason for the hope you have?
4. Why is it important for you to always be prepared to share this?
5. What can you do to better be prepared to share this?

Chapter Fourteen

All Scripture Profitable

When I turned thirty-three I decided I really wanted to read through the Bible. I'd been a Christian for fifteen years and memorized 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful. . . ." So I dove in and was blown away.

Throughout the year I shared treasures I found with friends around me. On December 31 I was excited as I finished the last chapter of Revelation. I'd done it. I'd read the whole Bible.

That was the end of that. Or so I thought.

After hearing all the neat things I discovered reading through the Bible, a bunch of friends said, "We want you to do it again so we can read through the Bible with you." January first found me diving back in and once a week hosting a group of women eager to read the Bible for themselves.

We read about four chapters a day, underlining anything that stood out to us, and then gathered once a week to share highlights. We were

having a great time. The women were so excited, they couldn't help but tell their friends. Each week the group grew.

When we started Leviticus, two sisters showed up. While talking with them, I realized they weren't Christians. I usually read the book of John with people who want to know Jesus, not Leviticus. But that's where they started.

Can you believe as we finished Leviticus, the oldest sister became a Christian? It was incredible seeing her life change. She was pregnant with her second child, and a chain smoker who had tried for years to kick the habit with no success. But after entering a relationship with Jesus her addiction to cigarettes was gone.

The other sister was in the middle of a nasty divorce. Her husband cheated on her and decided he wanted out of the marriage. She was a legal secretary and declared, "I'm not committing to anything until I've read the whole book." Sure enough, at the end of the year when she finished reading the Bible, she gave her life to Christ.

Did I ever learn that not only is all Scripture useful for believers, but God can save anyone through any part of His Word . . . even Leviticus. Is He ever an amazing God.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. What do you learn about God from this story?
3. **Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.** What do you learn about God's Word from this verse?
4. What role does God's Word play in you sharing hope?
5. How can you better incorporate God's Word when you are sharing with friends who don't yet know Jesus?

Chapter Fifteen

Purpose In Weakness

My biggest adventure with my husband started in 2000 when he came home and declared, “I think God wants us to go on staff with The Navigators.” At this point, our son was ten years old, and we were both in our late thirties. I couldn’t believe it.

The Navigators had a huge impact on both our lives during college. It made sense to bless another generation of students the way we’d been blessed. We told The Navigators we’d go anywhere they wanted us to.

They sent us back to our alma mater, The University of Florida, to help restart that ministry.

By the time we arrived, the campus had been without Navigator staff for eight years. No students were waiting to meet with us. When we got to campus, we had to initiate with every student we met. Because I’d lost 80% of my hearing by this point, I had no idea whether I could understand them or not.

I was ticked off.

“Lord,” I stormed. “I told you I’d go into ministry full-time right after college when I’d only lost 20 percent of my hearing, but You used my hearing loss to close that door. Now I’ve lost 80 percent, and You send us to a campus where we must start everything from scratch? What are You thinking?”

The next week a student from our home church asked if I’d be willing to facilitate a Bible discussion in her scholarship house. We were eager to take advantage of every opportunity, so I said, “Sure.”

When she showed me the list of girls who’d signed up, my heart dropped into my stomach. There were ten girls on that list. When you are deaf and understand by reading lists even meeting with two people can be like following a tennis match. How in the world would I follow the conversation with ten speakers?

I will never forget driving to Julie’s scholarship house that first night. I was so scared. I sat in the parking lot crying out to God. “Lord, there is only one reason I am going in there, and that’s because I believe you exist, and this is a worthwhile thing to do. But if you don’t show up and do something, I have no idea how I am going to manage this.”

It took everything I had to get out of the car and walk up to the house.

Once inside, I discovered we were meeting in a dining area with tiled floors and nearly bare walls. The acoustics were terrible. The girls were already sitting around a huge table staring at me. It was obvious they weren’t certain they wanted to be there.

I stammered. “I don’t know if Julie told you but I’m severely hearing impaired and understand by reading lips. I’m pretty much lost in large groups. I honestly have no idea how to make this work.”

Suddenly the girl on my left swung her arm over my shoulder and stated, “I’ll tell you how this is going to work. I’m a speech pathology

and audiology major and not one of you is going to talk unless you first wave your hand, so Deb knows which lips to look at.”

Constance taught all of us so much. I still use her suggestions today.

Heading home after that first study, I sensed the Lord say, “Do you realize if you’d gone in there as if you had it all together, ready to teach them the Bible, they might never have returned? But because you went in weakness, it pulled them together. They were determined to do what they needed to do to make this work.”

The Lord really did have a purpose for my disability.

That was one of the closest groups I’ve ever led. It was beautiful to see so many of those precious ladies start following Jesus.

Soon after this, I attended a workshop on campus titled, “Coping with Hearing Loss,” taught by a gentleman with dual doctorates in audiology and counseling. He shared that when people lose their hearing their world begins to get smaller due to fear and pride. They fear not being able to hear and saying the wrong thing, and they are too proud to ask for help.

As I listened, I sensed the Lord say, “Don’t you see, Deb? I didn’t want that to happen to you. You are here because I love you.” Sure enough, having to constantly leave my comfort zone to reach out and meet with students kept my world from getting smaller.

This isn’t only true for me or for people who are handicapped. Do you realize Jesus doesn’t need us to save anyone? He saved Paul by directly appearing to him.

As we age, it’s so easy to get comfortable and our world gets smaller as a result. But sharing the good news of Jesus Christ usually calls all of us out of our comfort zone as we have to battle fear and pride - it sure can be humbling if someone doesn’t respond well.

Jesus invites us to join him in what He's doing so our world doesn't get smaller. He invites us to share the reason for the hope we have inside because He loves us.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read 2 Corinthians 9:8.** What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?
3. How does the truth of this verse relate to you sharing the gospel?
4. How can knowing this help you grow in sharing hope with others?

Chapter Sixteen

Witness of Prayer

I love Halloween. It's the one time of the year when my neighbors come to me eager and excited to receive whatever I have to offer.

One year I opened the door to find a neighbor I'd never met from a block away. She was taking her grandson who'd recently moved from Uzbekistan trick or treating. When I told my son about him, he said, "I invited him to come play with us but he didn't respond, so I figured he wasn't friendly." Turned out Jafar didn't speak English. That night broke the ice.

Soon Jafar was at our house every afternoon. Andrew so enjoyed helping him learn English. "Lizard" he'd say, after they captured one, "This is a lizard." And Jafar would repeat, "Lizard."

About a year later Andrew received a scooter for Christmas. When Jafar saw it, he really wanted one, too. He saved his money and when he had enough I took the boys to the store to buy one.

At Christmas there'd been scooters for sale everywhere, the hot new toy everyone wanted. But this was months later.

We went to one store. No scooter. Then I drove to a second store. No scooter. We searched for an employee to ask if there were any in the

back, “There aren’t any left.” He explained. “Everybody is sold out.” Jafar sighed.

As we got into the car, I turned to look at the boys in the back seat, “Why don’t we pray and ask God to provide you with a scooter?” Jafar was skeptical but Andrew was all in. “Dear God, would you please provide a scooter for Jafar. He really wants one so he can ride with Andrew. We come asking in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

As we drove along, I saw a CVS. “Why don’t we try here?”

Andrew raced through the aisles with Jafar close behind. When we found the right section, the boys scanned the shelves. One shelf at the top was empty, except for a box at the back. It was a long rectangle. Both boys scrambled to reach it.

Can you believe there was one scooter left on that shelf? You have never seen two boys more excited.

As we climbed into the car I heard Jafar say to himself, “Maybe God really does care.”

Helping someone come one step closer to Christ—that’s one of my favorite definitions of evangelism. Was it ever beautiful seeing it transpire that day.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. In what ways have you helped others experience God’s love and care for them?
3. **Read John 16:24.** What role can prayer play in reaching out to others around you with the hope of the gospel?
4. How can knowing what God’s promised in John 16:24 help you grow in sharing Jesus with others’ around you?

Chapter Seventeen

Growing In Relationship

“I have this student who keeps raising her hand and asking spiritual questions. She’s heading up to the University of Florida this fall. I told her about you guys, so I expect you’ll be hearing from her.”

Fred, a high school physics teacher who’d been involved in Navigators when he was in college, was on the other end of the phone. We never know where the next lead for students may come from, but we’d recently arrived in Gainesville to help re-start the Navigator ministry at the University of Florida so were thankful for any leads coming our way.

Sure enough, Jim and a fellow Navigator ran into this student on campus one day. After seeing the Bridge Illustration, she responded, “That sounds too easy.”

“Would you like to get together with my wife to read the Bible and discuss it?” Jim offered.

She would. I agreed to meet her at a picnic table in front of her dorm.

Born in Hong Kong, Ting moved to Florida when she was 13. She mumbled, her voice barely a whisper, never looking me in the eye.

My first thought? There is no way God wants me to meet with this woman. I am deaf. God has given me the ability to read lips, but she barely moved hers. I literally asked her to repeat herself five times every time she spoke.

I asked a question and when she responded I had no clue what she'd said. "Ting, I'm sorry. Would you mind repeating that?"

She spoke again. Still, I had no idea what she said.

"I'm sorry Ting. Would you mind speaking a little louder?"

She answered again.

"Ting, I really want to hear your response. Would you mind lifting your face so I can read your lips?"

And so on, until I could finally piece together what she was saying.

I had never felt so handicapped. But also relieved. She'd never want to see me again after this. But she did. I couldn't believe it.

I asked another student, Monica, to meet with us the second time. As we headed back to my car, Monica exclaimed, "Deb, it is such a blessing you can't hear. Whenever you ask a question that hits too close to home, Ting responds with something totally off the wall like, 'I'd really like to have sex with my boyfriend right now.' But because you can't hear, you keep asking, 'Would you mind repeating that?' And by the fifth time she answers your question."

I met with Ting for four years.

Over time, I needed to ask her to repeat less. As she was listened to, she found her voice and began to look people in the eye and speak clearly. It was beautiful to see her blossom.

As I got to know Ting I discovered she came from a difficult background where no one listened or paid attention to her. She was relationally deprived. She needed to learn what it looked like to have a relationship with another person before she could picture what it meant to have a relationship with God.

After the Lord moved us to another campus, one of the girls I disciplined began meeting with her. They got together for another year, then Ting became a Christian—and so did her boyfriend.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What thoughts come to mind as you read this story?
2. How do you feel when you think about your weaknesses?
3. **Read 2 Corinthians 12:9** What was Paul's perspective about his weaknesses?
4. How can knowing this help you grow in sharing Jesus with others' around you?

Chapter Eighteen

Shared Quiet Time

On the fourth day of our spring break ski trip, with no snow in the forecast or on the mountains of West Virginia, we decided to let students enjoy time with Jesus. I was eager to get to know a new student who followed her boyfriend to Navigators. Tracy has spent the summer interning as a church youth leader.

“Would you like to get together and share a quiet time?”

“Sure.” Tracy bounced across the room and plopped down on the bed next to me as the rest of the students headed to cozy corners in the cabin or outside seeking warm spots in the sun.

I was praying big time for snow.

“What do you usually do when you spend time with the Lord?”

Tracy shrugged her shoulders. “I just read whatever.”

“Would you like me to show you what I do when I enjoy time each morning with Jesus?”

“Sure.”

“Do you have a notebook?” She grabbed one out of her backpack.

“How about we start in the book of Psalms?” I turn to Psalm 1.

“I love songs.” Tracy was a gifted musician. She brought her guitar and serenaded us each evening while my deaf ears followed along as I read the lyrics on her laptop.

I shared with her how I use the format Look, Listen, Live it out. And we wrote those words down the left margin of our notebooks, leaving space between them.

“Now in Isaiah 55 God says, ‘Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.’ God compares His Word to a feast. Think of a chapter of the Bible like a steak. What happens if you try to shove the whole thing in your mouth?”

Tracy started gagging, then pretended to pass out. She is quite the ham.

“Exactly. You won’t get much nourishment there. But what happens if you cut off one bite and chew it well?”

“Mmm mm.” Tracy smacked her lips. “You can really enjoy it. I love steak.”

“Me too. And you get the full benefit of all the nutrients. So, I read a passage of Scripture until one verse stands out to me and then I stop there. That’s my bite. I write that verse down next to where it says, “Look” in my notebook the moment something catches my attention. I don’t keep reading because then something else may stand out and I’ll have a hard time picking.”

Tracy laughed. “I hate making decisions.”

“Me too. Next to the word “listen” I write down what caught my attention as I read that verse and then record whatever stands out to me. Sometimes I’ll write out questions asking Jesus about them, then write what comes to mind and often I’m like, ‘Woah. That didn’t just come from me.’”

Tracy raised her eyebrows. “Seriously?”

I nod, “This really is about making space to actively listen to the Lord and hear whatever He wants to say to you through His Word.”

Tracy leaned forward.

“Then I always end my time asking Jesus, ‘What do you want me to do in response?’ It may be simple - like giving Him thanks for something or praising Him for what I’ve just learned about him, or he may lay on my heart to write a letter to someone or give an idea for how I can repair a relationship. So, I write whatever comes to mind next to where it says, Live It Out.”

Tracy pointed to the bottom of her journal. “Here?”

“Yes. That’s where this gets exciting because as I do this day after day, even if I only have ten minutes, that’s when I experience God speaking into my life in a way that can make such a difference. But it only makes a difference if I do my part and respond. Would you like to give it a try?”

“You bet.” She replied.

“Since we’re doing this with Jesus, why don’t we start by praying and asking Jesus to bless this time?”

Tracy prayed, “Hey God, we need snow. Could you please deliver?”

I ask the Lord to bless our ears and let us hear whatever He wants us to. “Why don’t we alternate reading verses in Psalm 1. You can read the first one, then I’ll read the next one. When a verse stands out to you put your pen down as a signal you’ve got your verse.”

“Ok.”

So Tracy started reading, then I read. We go all the way through the Psalm. She never puts her pen down.

“Sometimes I find I need to read the passage again to myself for a verse to stand out to me. Wanna try that?”

She nodded. So, we re-read the Psalm to ourselves. After a few minutes of silence, I asked, “Was there a verse that caught your attention?”

“You know,” Tracy shifted in her seat. “I’m having a hard time connecting with this Psalm.”

“Ok”. I turn to Psalm 23. There is so much treasure in that one. “Why don’t we go here. Did you like alternating reading verses? Some people prefer to read it all themselves or to hear someone else read it.”

“Why don’t you read it.” She suggested. So I did. Again, silence.

“I’m really not connecting with anything in there either.”

Inside I was crying out to Jesus for help. I’ve never had anyone not find a verse before and now we were headed to a third passage.

So I flipped to Psalm 19 and as soon as we read verse one, Tracy exclaimed, “That’s it. That’s my verse.”

I heaved a sigh of relief. “Sweet. What stands out to you?”

“It kind of reminds me of this rock song I know that talks about stars.” As she shared about the song, it dawned on me, *I think she’s blind.*

Tracy might be reading the Scriptures but she was spiritually blind to their intended meaning. She may have served as an intern in a church, but she didn’t yet know Jesus.

So while she took time to write down her verse and her thoughts, I asked the Lord for wisdom to know how He wanted me to join in with what He was doing. It wasn’t happenstance she was here on this trip or that I was getting this time with her.

After we finished sharing that quiet time, I asked, “Tracy, would you like to get together again and read a story of how Jesus interacted with a woman in the Bible?”

She nodded. “I’d love that.”

A student burst into the room. “Come quick, you guys. Snow just started falling. God answered our prayers.” We got flurries that day. We danced and played. The next morning, we woke to a winter wonderland perfect for skiing.

The skies most certainly proclaimed the work of God's hands. By the end of the semester, Tracy was no longer blind.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read 2 Corinthians 4:4.** Why is it important to know this when you are sharing the gospel with people?
3. How can knowing this reality help you grow in sharing Jesus with others' around you?

Chapter Nineteen

Unfinished Stories

W e'd only been at the University of South Florida a semester when a new student asked if I'd meet her for coffee. As I waited at Starbucks, another student friend passed by. I share with her my surprise Taneisha hadn't shown up yet.

"Have you checked the other Starbucks?"

There was another Starbucks on campus? I had no idea.

"Yes. It's in the library."

As I raced across campus, a text came in. "Guess I'm not important enough for you to meet. Maybe our paths will cross another time."

Oh God, I pray. Please don't let her leave.

My knees were killing me. But the library was in sight.

I caught her in the parking lot. "Please wait. I was at the other Starbucks."

She looked hard at me. Then beckoned to a nearby bench. "I want to tell you my story."

"My mom divorced my dad three days after I was born when she decided she was a lesbian." This precious student grew up attaching to her mom's partners and having her heart shattered over and over

each time another person she'd bonded with walked out of her life and her mom got a new partner.

When she entered college she contacted her dad, hoping he might help pay for her tuition. He did until they got into an argument. She was determined to show him she could make it on her own. But how?

Friends shared how much money she could make stripping. She loved to dance. Why not?

Her first job was so much fun... until she was gang raped by every man in the room.

"They actually thought I was dead when they scraped me off the floor." Stripping is illegal in Tallahassee so she couldn't report what happened. She moved from FSU to Tampa where stripping is legal so she could be protected,

At a bar she met a cute guy and while spending the night with him she woke up in horror. "I was being choked but I couldn't see anything. It was pure evil."

When she cried out for help, the guy told her, "Rebuke the demon in Jesus' name."

She did and the demon left. "At that moment, I knew God was real."

The guy was the son of a Baptist preacher. He shared the Lord with her. Then he invited her to move to Mississippi where he lived. He set her up in an apartment so she left everything to be with him. She was excited to finally have found true love.

Then he disappeared. Alone, in a new city, with no idea what to do, she hired a detective who found him in jail for tax evasion. He also discovered the guy had a wife and children.

Devastated Taneisha returned to USF to continue school. One of the precious women I was discipling met her in class and invited her to discuss the Bible with us.

Now we'd been seeing a number of students come to Christ but were having problems with some of them sleeping together.

"We were just kind of cuddling and playing around and well... next thing I know it happened."

So I began to do a study on a biblical view of sexuality with one of the new believers I disciplined. At the end of our first study, I asked what stood out to her. She exclaimed, "You know how in the movies people have sex and then fall in love? That isn't God's plan is it?"

She was so amazed at what she was learning she shared it with her new friend Taneisha, who recoiled, "No way. I am not giving up sex." Sex was the only way Taneisha had ever experienced love.

My friend exclaimed, "I'm not telling you what to do. I'm the last person to judge anyone. I was only telling you because I was blown away when I learned this." Sadly, Taneisha pulled back and stopped coming to Bible study.

For years, every time I would think about this, I felt deep grief. The beauty of one woman surrendering to Christ, to follow Him in a difficult area, sent another woman running away.

But then Jesus laid it on my heart to write down this story. As I wrote, I sensed the Lord saying to my heart, "Am I not big enough to have continued the story?"

Just because this one woman didn't continue to stay involved with us, did not mean the Lord hadn't provided in other ways for her.

And it hit me - I was taking responsibility where the Lord hadn't called me to. I needed to trust her to him, realizing He is the great discipler.

Then there was peace.

Without taking time to process and grieve and hear the Lord's perspective and release the person to him, I was carrying extra weight I hadn't even realized until after I wrote the story with Him.

I began to write stories as He brought them to mind. He highlighted them for a reason, helping me unpack a backpack I hadn't even realized was weighing me down.

For years I've gone from discipling one woman to the next, not taking time to process with the Lord each story and release her to Him.

What a wonderful lesson both in being responsive to the Lord's lead for healing and in how to better live in the days ahead.

There is a loss each time I stop meeting with someone. I'm excited as they head into their next chapter. And I certainly can't keep meeting with everyone forever. As they graduate or move on it creates space for me to be available for the next person the Lord wants me discipling, but if I don't intentionally take time to process with Jesus, that unfinished story will continue to weigh on my heart.

But I'm learning to consider: What unfinished stories do I need to process with Jesus?

I usually write about exciting stories and there are many of those but I often don't write about the heartaches in ministry. Living in a broken, fallen world there are a number of those, too.

I need to take time to do this on a regular basis.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read Matthew 11:28-30.** Are there any sharing hope failures you need to process with Jesus?
3. Do you ever take responsibility for people around you?
4. If so, what could it look like to repent of this and trust them to God?

Chapter Twenty

Power of Prayer

“I am tired of fighting lust. I’ve decided to give in to it.”

Tim was shocked. Chaz was one of our key student leaders. “Let me know if you ever want to talk.” said Tim as he watched Chaz walk away.

“How can he do that?” Another student exclaimed to me, reeling in the wake of Chaz’s departure, “He was key in me coming to know Christ.”

“Now we’ll have an opportunity to see if he truly is a believer. If he is, he won’t be able to walk away. God’s Spirit inside him will be grieved.” I shared, “God is a jealous God. “If he truly belongs to Jesus, He won’t just let him go his own way.”

We decided every time that we were together we would pray for Chaz. And we did.

At first he seemed to be having a great time. Periodically I’d see him on campus walking hand in hand with the girlfriend he now lived with, laughing, cuddling, and continuing on their way.

We kept praying.

Nine months later Chaz asks to get together with Tim, “I am miserable. I thought giving in to my lust would help. It’s only made it a thousand times worse.”

Our staff and students were excited to have him back. His girlfriend was perplexed. She had no interest in spiritual things, but she was still interested in Chaz.

I started praying for her big time. And I asked one of the girls I was discipling, who’d become a Christian the year prior, to reach out to her. I so longed to see Lenora come to know Jesus.

Chaz was now serving Jesus with a new fervor, coming to every event we hosted. And Lenora came right along with him, to be with him. Everyone welcomed her into our community. And God continued to work.

In January, she came to our annual conference. On Sunday during worship, the band played Casting Crowns song “Who Am I.”

The next day Lenora was at home pondering the question, *Who am I?* She’d grown up Catholic. Become a party girl. Popular. Fun. But she wondered, Who am I really?

Suddenly light broke through and she realized, “I am yours.”

She became a new creation in Christ that day.

Chaz went on to become a pastor and today Lenora is a mom of three, still walking with Jesus.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. What did the Lord use to bring Lenora to Himself? What do you learn about God from this?
3. **Read James 5:16.** What do you learn about prayer from this verse?

4. What role does prayer play in your sharing the good news of Jesus?

Chapter Twenty-One

Hidden Hindrances

“I believe you can still be a Christian and party.” My friend’s daughter announced when they came to stay with us while visiting the University of South Florida.

When she came to college, she joined a sorority and for the next few months, I never saw her. But then she contacted me asking if we could get together. She was being sucked into a downward spiral doing things she never thought she’d do. When drugs started to look good, she got scared.

As I prayed for the time, I asked the Lord for wisdom. What do you do with someone who has grown up in the church, is familiar with Bible stories, especially the New Testament? Was I ever surprised when the Lord laid it on my heart to take her through the book of Genesis one chapter at a time.

The first day we met, after listening to her share her heart, her struggles, where she was at, what she was hoping for, I asked if she'd like to read the Bible together. When she agreed we turned to the first chapter in the Bible.

"When you think about Genesis 1 what comes to mind?" I asked.

"Creation. Evolution. How things were made." She replied.

I nodded, "That's what most people think. But who is the main character in the Bible?"

She shrugged, "I don't know... Jesus?"

"Exactly. In the story of David and Goliath, what would've happened if God hadn't been present? What might the headlines read?"

She laughed, "Foolish kid clobbered by giant."

"And what might the headlines state if God wasn't present in the story of Jonah and the big fish?"

She laughed, "Runaway prophet becomes fish food."

"God really is the main character in every single story in the Bible, so it makes sense that the first chapter of the Bible is Him introducing Himself. But instead of saying "Hi. I'm God. I'm omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, sovereign..." he lets us catch glimpses of him in action being all those things."

I handed her a box of colored pencils. "Let's take out the yellow one and as we read through this first chapter of Genesis, highlight every time we see God's name mentioned."

After we did, I asked her to look at the page, "What do you notice?"

"God is all over the place."

"Now let's grab another colored pencil and as we read Genesis 1 again let's underline the verbs that tell us what God is doing."

Once again we took turns reading a verse and underlined the action words we found: created, hovering, separated...

When we were done, we considered them one at a time. “If Genesis 1 was all we knew about God, what could we learn from this? What does it tell you that God created? Why do you think that’s the very first thing God lets us see him doing? What difference can it make in your life to know that God creates?”

We discussed that for a while. Then I asked, “What about the next word: hovered? What does it reveal about God that when he starts creating, even when what He creates doesn’t look like much, when it’s still formless and empty, that he remains close, protecting what he’s created?”

That launched a fascinating discussion.

“Now let’s each select one verb we underlined to do a deep dive on. For five minutes write down everything that comes to mind as you consider this about God.”

After we did this she shared she focused on the word “Said.” She was a communications major. “Every time God speaks, whatever he says happens. And this happens repeatedly.”

We discussed what difference it can make in her life to know this about God.

I chose to focus on how God “set” the sun and moon exactly where they needed to be. If the sun was one degree closer, we’d burn up. If the sun was one degree further away we’d freeze. It is mind-blowing to consider how detailed God is.

And I shared how this brings to my mind Acts 17:26-27, “He determines the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. He does this so men will seek Him...” It’s not happenstance that we both live in Tampa.

At the end of our time, she asked, “Could we get together next week to do more of this?” I smile. I am so thankful I listened to the Lord.

We met for the rest of the semester, working our way through Genesis. But something strange began to happen. Each week after we spent time in God’s Word I saw the longing in her heart to surrender to the Lord but something kept blocking her. Week after week I saw her draw closer but sadly walk away.

Oh Lord. I prayed, What is going on?

The next year God “set” Jim and I in Tallahassee so I stopped meeting with this student. But each time I came to Tampa we’d get together.

A year and a half later I called to let her know I’d be in Tampa and she jumped at the opportunity to connect. She contracted an STD from an unfaithful boyfriend and was devastated. “I don’t know why I always need a guy in my life.”

“In Jeremiah 33:3 God makes an incredible offer. He says, ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and hidden things you do not know.’ Would you like to ask the Lord to reveal what’s going on in your heart?”

She eagerly agreed so together we approached the throne of God in prayer.

The Lord met her and revealed the root of her “addiction.” Behind her need to always have a guy in her life were lies she’d believed and a vow she’d made when she was younger.

When she repented of believing the lie and renounced the vow, she became free to surrender to Jesus. Her life was forever changed and she continues to walk with Jesus.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read Genesis 1.** What could you learn about God from this chapter of the Bible if you never knew anything about him

before?

3. How does this chapter of the Bible relate to sharing hope?

Chapter Twenty-Two

Will You Still Eat My Food?

The first time I had lunch with my neighbor Joyce, I arrived while she was still preparing the food so she asked me to share my story with her.

When I reached the part where I became a Christian, she stopped what she was doing, put up her hands, and said, “Before we go any further you need to know I’m an atheist. Do you still want to be here? Are you still willing to eat my food?”

She’s had people walk out when she told them that.

We enjoyed a wonderful two hours together. For being an atheist she had a lot of religious art in her home - so many statues of Buddha. Since we both love to read, we decide to start our own book club. We called ourselves the Bookworm Babes.

A while later when we gathered for tea before discussing our book of the month she asked about the workshop I gave the previous day. “What did you speak on?”

My answer was all about how I get to interact with and experience the Lord, someone she doesn't believe exists. But she likes to get together and says she enjoys the time.

One month Joyce suggested we read Winterdance by Gary Paulson. He is a wonderful writer and this book is a true story about him running the Iditarod. It is hysterical, well-written, and insightful into the perspective of someone who is an atheist.

In the prelude, he shared an incredible story of how he miraculously escaped death. Multiple miracles took place that saved his life, and he concluded, "All luck."

Another time T.S. Elliot's book Middlemarch resulted in one of our deepest spiritual discussions and I was able to share much of the gospel with her. As we talked, Jesus was so present and at work drawing her to Himself. But in the days that followed she backpedaled and her walls went back up.

I pray the Lord continues to draw her to Himself and that one day she will be open to reading the greatest book of all - the Bible.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read Acts 10:1-35.** What barrier does Peter have to deal with in order to be available to share the gospel with Cornelius?
3. Are there any barriers standing in the way of you sharing the reason for your hope with others around you?

Chapter Twenty-Three

Role of Boundaries

Our neighborhood is the last one before farm country starts. I love to walk and pray in the wide-open spaces. One day I see an eagle swoop down and steal hay from a nearby horse farm. There's also a peacock farm and I never know where I'm going to see those birds next.

But I'm learning all is not peaceful and serene on these farms.

One day, while walking and praying, I saw a woman in a golf cart pull off to the side of the road. As I passed, she called out, "Whatcha doing?"

After I shared I am walking and praying, I asked if she had anything she'd like prayer for.

She shared her mother recently died. I not only got to pray for her but shared the bridge illustration. When I asked if she'd like to start reading the Bible together, she jumped at the opportunity.

She comes from a rough background, is barely literate and can't drive anything but a golf cart. The place she lives is scary.

Her partner's brother, who lives in a trailer outside, often trips out. There are huge "No Trespassing" signs posted, and dogs roam the property. I invited her to my house to read the Bible.

At 10 am the next morning I texted, "Would you like to come over?"

She texted back, "Sure." But she didn't arrive until 6:30 pm, the same time my husband arrived home for dinner. He was hungry as he often works through lunch handling problems.

I put food on the table so he could eat, then Joyce and I go to another room to read and talk. We shared a great time in the Word.

But then this kept happening.

She was so eager to read and discuss the Bible, but seemed incapable of coming when invited and shows up at times that are killing me caring for Jim.

I invited her to eat with us but she wasn't hungry.

My husband was frustrated and I felt caught in the middle.

Who was I supposed to be available to?

My friend Jean Fleming encouraged me I needed to set boundaries. Joyce seemed incapable of honoring them and eventually disappeared.

I cried out to God, "I just wish I could be available 24/7."

And he replied, "You mean you want to be me?"

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read Psalm 16:5-11.** How do these verses relate to sharing hope?
3. What role should boundaries play in sharing the gospel?

Chapter Twenty-Four

Where Are You At Work God?

When Covid began I sensed the Lord laying on my heart the most important thing He wanted me to do was to pray for my husband and son for an hour each day. They were each running companies overseeing operations. Caring for employees in the middle of a pandemic is no small task.

Praying isn't telling God what I think he should do, but listening and enjoying the One who holds the Universe together. I'm an active prayer who loves to connect with the Lord outdoors in nature so as I walk, we talk and I never cease to be amazed at the things I often hear as I slow down and listen.

One day as I prayed I sensed the Lord say to me, "The next time your neighbor asks you to pray for her ask if you could share the bridge illustration with her." I was surprised. We'd only started interacting.

But sure enough, as I headed back into our cul-de-sac my neighbor came out to walk her dog and asked if I would pray for her. After I did I asked, “Would you be interested in seeing an illustration that summarizes the main message of the Bible?” She replied, “Maybe. I’ll let you know.”

Two days later I received a text, “My company just let 400 people go. I am out of a job. Can I come see that illustration?”

She had never read the Bible before. For two hours I shared the bridge illustration and answered her questions as we dialogued about the gospel. When I asked, “Where would you place yourself on this illustration.” She picked the paper up, carefully folded it, and asked, “Can I keep this? I want to think about this.”

It has been so exciting to see how the Lord’s been at work in her heart. If I hadn’t been out walking and praying, listening to hear what the Lord wanted to say, I never would’ve thought to ask to show her the bridge illustration.

From Henry Blackaby I learned to ask, “Where are you at work God? How do you want me to join in?”

I’m finding when I take time to listen, it’s amazing how eager He is to show me.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read Jeremiah 33:3.** How do these verses relate to sharing hope?
3. Have you ever taken God up on this offer when sharing hope? If yes, what did that look like? If no, what could it look like for you to do this?

Chapter Twenty-Five

Living With Expectancy

One day while I was walking and praying shortly after the Covid pandemic began, a neighbor pulled up in her car and shared how tough it was having to oversee her kids doing school on top of working.

I sensed the Lord nudging me to offer, “Do you think your daughter would like to come outside and do art with me?” Her face broke into a huge smile.

Word spread and that afternoon neighborhood kids showed up on my lawn where I’d laid out towels six feet apart, carefully placing art materials and a Bible on each towel.

The first week I taught the kids Psalm 56:3-4 as a song: When I am afraid I put my trust in you, in God whose word I praise, in God I trust, I shall not be afraid, what can flesh do to me?

After the kids shared their fears, I shared the story of Jesus calming the storm and they created a picture.

The pandemic was hard on kids. They pick up on the emotions of others around them. They can feel rejected and confused, disappointed as well as afraid. It was such a privilege getting to address those while helping children, many who've never read the Bible, come to know the One who is with them, who cares about them, who can calm the storm.

These art journal Bible club meetings often aren't pretty. One day I tried reading the Sermon on the Mount from the Jesus Storybook Bible. When it asked, "Have you ever seen a bird have a pantry?" one little girl raised her hand.

"No, Mrs. Debbie but squirrels gather nuts and that's kind of like a pantry."

Then another said, "I once sold acorns and made two dollars."

And a third said, "That's actually a good idea. If people planted those acorns we'd have more trees and that would be good for the planet."

Go with the flow took on new meaning.

But a few weeks later one little girl exclaimed, "Mrs. Debbie, it's not wrong to be afraid."

I agreed, "You're right, sweetheart. That's why Psalm 56 begins, "When I am afraid..."

She nodded, "When I'm afraid of the dark, I sing that verse and it helps me sleep."

She remembered what we talked about and was turning to the Lord for help.

In our last class we discussed how Jesus is the Word of God. The kids cut out favorite words from magazines.

I cut out the word "Wonder" and shared, "I love this Word, because it reminds me how wonderful God is."

One six-year-old jumped up, “I love that word, too. This Art Journal Bible Club is super duper wonderful.”

I have to agree. I love seeing how faithful God is to bring good out of all things... even this Covid Crisis.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-13.** What can it look like to live with a sense of expectancy, eagerly anticipating what the Lord might do next?
3. How could this attitude impact your sharing of the reason for the hope you have?

Chapter Twenty-Six

Shared Stories

The day after George Floyd's murder, I walked with a neighbor. She is Mexican, her husband is African American. We shared our outrage. Then she shared her fear and recent stories of how they experienced prejudice.

My friend is beautiful. A few days prior she was talking with a neighbor about restaurants they enjoy. When she shared one she'd been wanting to try, the neighbor warned she should avoid, "that part of town because it's filled with Mexicans."

She exclaimed, "My family is from Mexico." He had no idea. She was deeply hurt.

I shook my head, "Oh friend, I am so sorry." As I listened, I was crying out to the Lord asking for wisdom. How could I respond? What does love look like?

I shared, "There's a story in the Bible that reveals how God feels about prejudice. Would you like to hear it?"

Would she ever.

"Well, there's a leader in Israel who marries a woman with dark skin. His brother and sister don't like that and start to cause problems,

complaining and challenging his leadership. You know what God does?”

She shook her head,

“He turned the sister white with leprosy.”

My friend’s jaw dropped. “No way.”

“Yes, it’s like God’s saying you don’t like Moses’ wife being black? I’m going to make you whiter than you’ve ever been. And she can no longer live with the people since leprosy is contagious, so she has to live outside the camp and experiences what it’s like to be excluded because of her color. God hates prejudice. He is the one who created us with beautiful variety.”

As we neared the end of our walk my friend shared, “I will never read the Bible, but I love it when you tell me stories from it.”

A year later want to guess who started to read the Bible with me?

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read Deuteronomy 6:6-7.** Sharing hope can be sharing our story of how we entered into a relationship with Jesus. It can also be current stories of how we are experiencing Him. But it can also include sharing stories from God’s Word. Why do you think it’s important that we be able to talk about God’s Word when we sit, walk, lie down (think at the beach as you’re soaking in the rays. ;0) or get up?
3. What can it look like for you to have God’s Word so internalized you can connect it to current events and share stories in your conversations? What needs to happen for this to take place?

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Sharing Weakness

“**W**ould you like to walk?” Another neighbor asks. As we treaded the miles, she shared her son has a girlfriend. A first. “I am so not ready for this.”

When I asked if she’d talked with him about sex, she shared she was thankful for a youth group he attended. “They are talking about that.”

When I asked, “Would you like to read the Bible together so you can talk with him about what he’s learning?” she was not at all interested. But she never minded her daughter coming over for the art journal Bible club I hosted for kids in the neighborhood.

The next week I shared Psalm 23 with the kids. When we read, “He leads me beside still waters,” my friend’s daughter asks, “How does God do that? How does He lead you?”

When I asked the kids if they’d like to hear a story as an example, every head bobbed up and down.

So I shared how the previous week I raced to TSA pre-check at Sarasota airport, thankful to have packing behind me and eager to dive into training the Rocky Mountain Navigator staff in Colorado. My brain was filled to overflowing with all I'd been learning, synthesizing new concepts and preparing to present. When I placed my boarding pass on the reader the light turned red.

"Whoops. I must've given you the wrong one," I was scheduled to change planes in Ft. Lauderdale before heading to Denver.

When I put the second boarding pass down, the light turned red again. "Let me see that," the security officer asked. "Ma'am, we don't have a terminal C at this airport. Your ticket is for Tampa."

I came to the wrong airport.

My plane was scheduled to depart in 30 minutes. There was no way I could make it in time.

I raced downstairs to the Southwest desk which amazingly was clear of people. "I can't believe I came to the wrong airport..."

After hearing my predicament, the agent replied, "Just this once, we'll reschedule you. You can fly to Dallas and then catch a plane from there to Denver."

The only problem? I was supposed to arrive at 7:45 pm and be picked up by the regional leaders as they drove from Colorado Springs to Ft. Collins. My new flight wasn't scheduled to arrive until 11 pm.

Thankfully, I have a friend on staff who lives right by the airport, who planned to drive to Ft. Collins the next morning, but I needed to find a way to get to her house.

I groaned as the Uber app stated at that time in Denver there were, "No rides available." As I boarded the flight to Dallas, my mind raced, my stomach churned. As I buckled my seat belt, I sensed the Lord gently ask, "Daughter, whose job is it to provide for you?"

I exhaled, "Yours, Lord." Peace flooded in.

When I arrive in Dallas, I noticed there were two flights listed to Denver. One departed in three minutes, two gates away.

I raced to the counter, “Is there any way I can get on this earlier flight?”

It was a packed plane, but one seat was unclaimed. Since it was so close to departure they gave it to me. As I boarded, I asked the woman ahead of me, “What time does this flight arrive in Denver?” She replied: “7:45”. The exact time I was scheduled to arrive on the flight from Ft. Lauderdale.

When I looked at the boarding pass I discovered I only made that flight because it was delayed 6 minutes.

I only wish you could’ve seen the kid’s faces when I shared this story with them.

“That is awesome.” They exclaimed.

But this story didn’t end there. Later that night I received a text from my neighbor, “Thank you so much for having my daughter over. She told me the story of you making it on your plane.”

I never cease to be amazed at how God’s strength is made evident through my weakness.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.** How does this passage relate to sharing hope?
- 3.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Listening to Love

” Are you heading home or off on a fun trip?” I ask as a woman settled into the seat next to me.

“I am headed for fun. I’m a teacher and I just finished another school year. I’m headed to Denver to visit my best friend and celebrate.”

When I asked her what she taught she replied, “I’m an art teacher.”

“What’s your favorite art medium?” She loved to create with a variety of tools and eagerly told me about the projects she gives her students each year.

When I asked if she had pictures I could see, she lit up. From bubble prints to wood block sculptures to paint and pour ornaments and plaster wrapping balloons, this woman is one gifted art teacher.

I share about my art journal club for neighborhood kids and that I’m always searching for new ideas. I am simply amazed at what she showed me.

“Do you think you could send me some of those pictures? I’d love to do this with the kids in my art journal club.”

When she agreed I gave her my number and she started texting pictures to me, then said, “We’ve been talking most this flight about me, tell me about yourself.”

When I shared I’m the great great great great granddaughter of a pirate she is fascinated. But when I share my testimony of how I came to know the Lord my first week at the University of Florida, I notice she gets quiet. So I return to asking her about her art.

She doesn’t ask me any more questions.

“Well Lord,” I prayed, “I tried.”

The next day I text to thank her, “It was such a joy sitting next to you yesterday and getting to see so many of the wonderful projects you’ve done with your students. I am simply amazed and have been telling my sister and nieces all about you and your art classes. Thank you so much for sending pictures. You have totally blessed the socks off me. Big BIG hugs from your Florida friend.”

She texted me back, “Yes, I feel the same. I told my friend and my sisters how God had blessed me with you. Normally, I am a little scared but this time was the best ever. Thank you and I can send more about the projects to you when I can get to my computer. I hope you are enjoying yourself as well. I would love to learn more about what you do. I am a work in progress myself with my spirituality. I cannot quit thinking about all the seats on the airplane and He blessed me by you. God is amazing.”

You never know what the Lord may do when you interact with people. I can’t wait to send her the pictures from my art journal kids making some of her ideas and see how the Lord wants to continue this story.

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. Consider this quote from Lilius Trotter:

Some years ago, when a new railway cutting was made in East Norfolk, you could trace it through the next summer, winding like a blood-red river through the green fields. Poppy seeds that must have lain buried for generations had suddenly been upturned and had germinated by the thousand.

The same thing happened a while back in the Canadian woods. A fir-forest was cut down, and the next spring the ground was covered with seedling oaks, though not an oak-tree was in sight. Unnumbered years before there must have been a struggle between the two trees, in which the firs gained the day, but the acorns had kept safe their latent spark of life underground, and it broke out at the first chance.

And if we refuse to stay our faith upon results that we can see and measure, and fasten it on God, He may be able to keep wonderful surprises wrapt away in what looks now only waste and loss. What an up-springing there will be when heavenly light and air come to the world at last, in the setting up of Christ's kingdom. The waste places may see "a nation born in a day."

All that matters is that our part should be done.

3. Read Ecclesiastes 11:6 (and if you have time check out Matthew 13:1-23). How does this passage relate to sharing hope?

4. We never know how the seeds we plant may turn out. Sometimes the seeds we cast seem to not take root, but you never know.... What thoughts come to mind as you consider times when people have responded negatively when you've shared the gospel that even so a seed may have been planted that years down the road may take root and bear fruit?

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Asking God For Ideas

On a trip home from Montrose, I was about to board the plane (it's such a small airport you walk across the tarmac) when I was informed the flight was delayed due to severe weather in Denver.

As I headed back inside, I decided it might be wise to make sure my phone was charged before taking off just in case something happened.

The only outlet I could find was a way from the gate so I asked a young guy sitting a few seats from me if he'd share the content of any announcements (sometimes even with my cochlear implants those sound garbled).

As we waited, he kept me updated. What a gift. I would've missed pre-boarding if he hadn't alerted me.

I was assigned a seat in the last row of the plane. The flight was packed and can you believe out of 90 passengers the guy who helped me just happened to be assigned the seat beside me.

When he sat down, I thought, "There has to be a reason for this."

Turns out he was 21, loves rap music, and was about to graduate from college with a degree in mass communications, had a bit of an accent, and I discover his family comes from Mexico and he worked in a tortilla factory during high school.

I am really getting to know this guy. But he doesn't ask me a single question.

Halfway through the flight I prayed, "Jesus if you want me saying something to him about you, I'm going to need an idea." Suddenly, I realized I haven't introduced myself.

Now with masks, on a small plane, it is not easy to hear so I pulled out my composition notebook and the words I couldn't figure out he was writing down.

When I tell him my name is Debbie, he says his name but I can't catch it. Imagine my surprise when he writes, "Jesus."

Does that ever open the door to talk about the Lord. He doesn't know much about his namesake.

Toward the end of the flight, I asked if there was anything I could pray for him and he pointed out the window. As we neared Denver, we were experiencing turbulence and I realized he was scared.

I always like to begin my prayers with gratitude, so I started, "Thank you Jesus..."

And he replied, "You're welcome."

He thought I was talking to him.

After praying I was able to share the story of Jesus with the disciples on the sea of Galilee. How wonderful it is to know that the One who has power over the wind and storms cares for us and wants a personal relationship with us.

Our safe landing was doubly special. Would you join me in praying that Jesus will come to know Jesus? And that the seeds of God's Word planted will take root in His heart and bear a crop a hundredfold?

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read James 1:5.** How does this passage relate to sharing hope?
3. What could it look like for you to take the Lord up on this promise when you share the gospel?

Chapter Thirty

A few months ago I met with a hearing-impaired woman who is considering getting cochlear implants. When she asked to hear my story I dove in. And you have to know the Lord is all over my story.

When I sensed her pull back, I said, "I'm sorry. I didn't even ask where you're coming from spiritually."

She declared, "I'm an atheist."

I shared, "I can try to tell you my story without mentioning God but you won't get much of the story."

She nodded, "It's your story. I don't mind you mentioning God."

I find getting permission at the start can really help open doors. And did God ever start opening them.

When I finished sharing my story she exclaimed, "Listening to you makes me wish I believed in God." Then she went on to tell me how she grew up going to a fundamentalist church that focused on following rules, rules they demanded she follow even though she kept seeing people in the church not live them out. Her parents, even though they knew early on she was severely hearing impaired, decided they were going to raise her as if she was "normal." So, whenever she'd ask them to repeat something, they refused. "It was the same at church," she shared. "I basically raised myself."

"Then when I went to college, I got involved in a Christian group but when I didn't convert on their schedule they shut me out."

How my heart hurt as I listened to her. When I shared, "Jesus isn't like that" she raised her eyebrows, so I went on to share examples of how He really cares for people.

"You don't have to take my word for it. Listen to what He says in Matthew 11:28-30."

Thankfully I had a copy of the Message Bible with me so I pulled it out and read, "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

"That's in the Bible?" she asked.

When I nodded yes and held it out so she could see, she exclaimed, "I have to get a copy of that."

As she took out a pen to write down the version, I offered, "Would you like my copy?"

Eagerly she took it, assuring me she was going to start reading it!

She also took a copy of my booklet *Journey to Hear* which tells more of my story (and God's story!) and said she definitely wanted to read that.

As we parted, I invited her to let me know if she had more questions about cochlear implants or what she was reading. Then we hugged and went our separate ways.

Don't you just love how the Lord is always at work?

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

2. **Read John 5:17.** How does this passage relate to sharing hope?
3. What difference could it make if you asked permission before sharing with someone? (Note: a great book that explores this more is Permission Evangelism: When to Talk, When to Walk by Michael Simpson)

Chapter Thirty-One

On my way home from Houston, I smiled at the empty seat beside me. It'd been an intense week of interaction with many opportunities to share Jesus. My heart was happy, but I was exhausted. As the last passengers boarded I prayed, "Jesus, if this seat stays empty it would be a gift but if there's someone you want me to share with, I am willing for them to sit there."

The next moment a woman raced onto the plane and plopped down in that very seat declaring,

"I'm a mess. I don't even know why I'm here. I planned to kill myself two days ago."

My first thought? *She doesn't need me, she needs a counselor.*

I sensed Jesus whisper, *No, Deb. She needs me. And I want you to tell her about me.*

So I did. For the next hour I listened to her story and shared the reason for the hope I have. Soon I was drawing the bridge illustration as she read different verses in the Bible.

In my quiet time that morning I'd read Revelation 3:20, where Jesus says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with him and he will eat with me."

As I shared this verse with her, she exclaimed, “This is exactly what I need. To open that door and let God come inside. I’m going to have to pray to ask him.”

Soon as I shared she didn’t have to wait to pray, she cried out, “Jesus! I need you! I’ve blown it really bad and I know I don’t deserve any attention from you, but thank you that you died for me. I want a relationship with you.”

I can only imagine how the angels in heaven were singing!

When I asked if she’d like to have my Bible, she looked at me with astonishment, “Oh I couldn’t take your Bible.” When I shared I had more at home, she clasped it to her heart and said, “I am going to read this every day. I want to know the Bible the way you do, so I can help others the way you’ve helped me.”

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?
2. **Read John 7:38.** How does this passage relate to sharing hope?
3. I’m not a big fan of formulas, but Bill Hybels once shared a fascinating one:

HP+CP+CC = MI

This stands for High Potency plus Close Proximity plus Clear Communication equals Maximum Impact. How do you see each of these evident in the previous story?

CP = You may wonder why a lot of my stories take place in an airplane. I love how traveling beside someone certainly creates Close Proximity, at least for an hour or two. But this also can occur in a neighborhood (if we’ll get out of our houses), where we work, or when

interests, even handicaps are shared. I find people tend to draw closer when I share or connect with them in areas of my own weakness.

CC = This is something I keep seeking to grow in. I want to clearly communicate the gospel. It's one reason it can be helpful to have a gospel illustration and the Scriptures memorized. But you also want to know your testimony well enough so you can adapt it to different situations you find yourself in. I've heard one person describe viewing your testimony as an accordion one that can expand or contract in the telling based on how much time you have and the listener's interest.

HP = High Potency occurs when we spend time with Jesus in His Word. Time after time I am amazed at how what I've just been reading in the Scriptures has opportunity to come up in discussions with people. Remember how Moses' face shone after he'd spent time with the Lord? When we give out of the overflow of our time with Jesus can it ever be powerful.

Most people have a strength, a stretch and a struggle. Which one of the three comes easiest to you? Which one is more of a struggle? While this can change, for me that often is clear communication, so that is my greatest opportunity to experience Jesus' strength in my weakness. Which is your greatest opportunity for experiencing Jesus?

4. What do you sense Him inviting you to do in response?

Chapter Thirty-Two

The Stories Continue...

“Are you in line to preboard?”

I nodded yes and explained, “I’m deaf. Boarding early gives me the opportunity to let the flight attendants know there is someone with a hidden handicap on the plane. Even though I now can hear with cochlear implants, if there was impact, I could lose them and be lost as the day is long.”

The woman held up her ticket, “I preboard too.” She leaned in, “I have major flight anxiety.”

Her husband nodded, “She’s not kidding.”

When I offer to pray for her she says yes, but not yet, then asks if I will sit beside her.

I usually sit at the back of the plane. This lets me alert all the flight attendants and that way people know I’m not taking advantage of preboarding for personal gain, but I’m sensing this time Jesus might want me to alter my plan.

When she picks the very first row I pull my Bible, notebook, and pen out of my backpack.

I have the opportunity to share about Jesus as we get acquainted and I tell her about the miracle the Lord did restoring my hearing through cochlear implants. I notice that the more I talk, the more nervous she gets, but when she talks she gets calmer so I focus on listening, hearing her share her story.

Turns out twenty years prior she developed a heart condition called SVT, went into cardiac arrest and almost died. She went to see a top cardiologist and he told her, if she was ever more than 25 minutes away from help, she'd die.

She shared, "Before this happened, I never struggled with fear, but after," she rolled her eyes, "my life became consumed with fear. It destroyed my life and my family."

A week prior to our flight she'd seen another cardiologist who told her the problem wasn't life-threatening, that the first doctor had been wrong. This was wonderful news! But her husband, whom she'd recently married, couldn't understand why the fear didn't go away.

When I shared with them about implicit memories, she turned to her husband and said, "See I'm not crazy."

I then shared it sounded like she'd believed a lie and in her effort to self-protect probably made a vow to never be more than 25 minutes away from help.

She nodded, "That's exactly it."

But when I started to share how Jesus could set her free, she wasn't interested and decided to spend the last part of the flight sleeping.

This is where I'm wishing I had the gift of evangelism. *I tried Lord. If there is anything else you want me to do would you please bring it to mind.*

The idea came to tear a piece of paper out of my notebook and write down the name of a church in town where she could get counseling. I also listed Dr. Curt Thompson's podcast where I learned about implicit memories and Rusty Rustenbach's book An Inner Guide to Listening and Healing Prayer which shares how to renounce lies and break vows.

As we talked, I learned she lives a little north of me so I wrote down my phone number and email in case she'd like to talk more, then filled the rest of the page with verses that could encourage her on her flight home at the end of the weekend.

I also drew a picture, not a very good picture, of God's hand holding the plane and her and write Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

As the plane started to land she woke and grabbed my hand. There was turbulence so I asked if she'd like me to pray. This time she was ready. After the plane came to a stop her husband leaned over, "That is the most calm she's ever been on a flight. It is not a coincidence that you sat with us."

When I gave her the verses and the picture she clasped them to her heart. "Thank you so much! I am going to hold this picture in my hand the whole flight home and after you return I will give you a call."

As I watched her and her husband head out of the airport, I had no idea whether or not I'd see her again. Seeds were planted. I prayed binding the enemy in Jesus' name from snatching them away and committed her and the rest of her story to Jesus. The words of Jesus from Mark 14:8 came to mind, "She did what she could."

And it was good.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE:

1. What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

2. **Read Mark 14:8.** How does this passage relate to sharing hope?
3. What difference could it make if you remember Jesus' words when you share the gospel?
4. **THE CHALLENGE:** Start writing down the stories you get to experience as you follow Jesus. Then consider, what do you learn about sharing hope from each of them? If you do this, I think you'll be surprised at how much it helps you to keep growing in sharing hope and experience even more the abundant life Jesus paid so dearly to make available to you!

Chapter Thirty-Three

Questions?

Contact Deb Entsminger
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