



"And I pray
that the sharing
of your faith
may become effective
for the full knowledge of
every good thing
that is in us
for the sake of Christ."

Philemon 1:6

sharing
HOPE



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

QUESTIONS?

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Did that ever open the door to talk about the Lord! He didn'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.

Can I just say 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 hundred fold?

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read James 1:5. How does this passage relate to sharing hope?

What could it look like for you to take the Lord up on this promise when you share the gospel?

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,⁸⁰ 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!

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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 ways 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."

Turned 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 discovered his family came from Mexico and he worked in a tortilla factory during high school.

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

Half way 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 hadn'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 as we conversed, he wrote down.

When I told him my name is Debbie, he said his name but I couldn't catch it. Imagine my surprise when he wrote, "Jesus."

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Consider this quote from Liliias 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.

Read Ecclesiastes 11:6 (and if you have time check out Matthew 13:1-23).

How does this passage relate to sharing hope?

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?

1

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 just happened to me. I'll admit it. I was scared.

I was the youngest in a class composed mostly of upperclassmen. The guy next to me said he 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, she 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 had happened to me, so I'm sure whatever I shared was a bit fuzzy.

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

It wasn't really 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

What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?

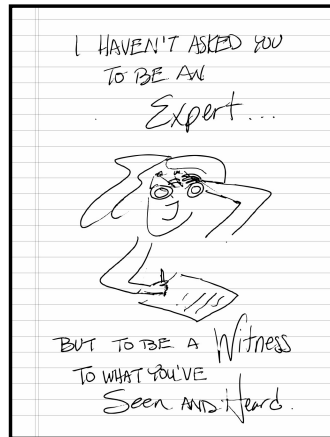
Have you ever struggled to share your story? Why or why not? What happened as a result?

Read Mark 5:18-20. What did the man want to do? What did Jesus ask him to do?

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)

How much did he need to know to do what Jesus asked him to do?

How does His story connect with your story?



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 am hoping 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 can not 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.



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"Are you heading home or off on a fun trip?" I asked 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 shared she loves 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, her face lit up. From bubble prints to wood block sculptures to paint and pour ornaments and plaster wrapping balloons, this woman was one gifted art teacher!

I shared about my art journal club for neighborhood kids and that I'm always searching for new ideas. I was 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 was fascinated. But when I shared my testimony of how I came to know the Lord my first week at the University of Florida, she got quiet. So I returned to asking her about her art.

She didn't ask me anymore questions.

"Well, Lord," I prayed, "I tried."

The next day I texted to thank her, "Nora! 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 been telling my sister and nieces all about you and your art classes! Thank you so much for sending these pictures!!! You have totally blessed the socks off me! Big BIG hugs from your Florida friend."

2

When you learned I became a Christian 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 really 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 that 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 begin to wonder: I know God exists. But does He really want a personal relationship with us or did He just 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 single 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.

My senior year of high school I was desperately searching 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. 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's real. What could I give my life to?

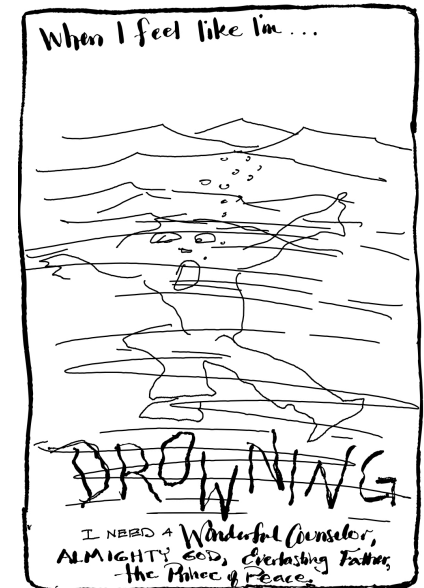
My favorite teacher loved to read and gave me books after she finished them. They were all literary pornography. Then she shared the tenets of feminism and I read, "A woman should be able to have sex with a man without a relationship just like men have with women." I thought, Hey, I can test that out!

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. How does this passage relate to sharing hope?

How can God be glorified in your weaknesses?



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 had 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.” Boarding 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 arrived in Dallas I noticed there were two flights listed to Denver. One scheduled to depart 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 a seat remained unclaimed. While boarding, 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!

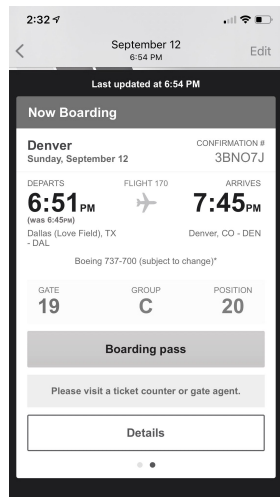
(When I looked at the boarding pass I discovered I only made that flight because it was delayed 6 minutes!)

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

“That is awesome!” They exclaimed.

But this story doesn’t end there. Later that night I get a text from my neighbor, “Thank you so much for having Aria over. She told me about all sorts of stories including you making it on your plane!!!”

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



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

The poor guy is like, “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. But it’s super expensive. After visiting the campus I decided I didn’t want to go there and waste my parents’ money since I hadn’t even 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 the other saleswoman, “Tonight I’m going to go with John.”

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

Seriously? I had no idea. All summer he had flirted with me almost nonstop. 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? 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, handing the cards back to him. I am blind as a bat to their meaning. But those prayers . . .

The next morning I woke up, “What was I thinking? That is a dead end relationship! And I am totally getting 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 backup 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 she wouldn’t come home barfing or smoke 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 isn’t much to Gainesville. 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.”

It’s an old Victorian house two blocks from campus. I love old homes! And since I won’t have a car, the distance is perfect. As I stepped in the front door I felt peace. I’d been in so much turmoil inside.

Then I learned it only costs \$80 a month, which includes meals. They even have a washer and a dryer! I want to be here.

When they ask if I’m a Christian, I reply, “Prayed the prayer when I was eight!”

They invite me to move in!

A week later I do. Now this is in the days before Computers. Everyone comes to campus a week early because you literally have to run from building to building trying to put together your schedule. Drop/Add consists of a long list where they manually write down and cross out names.

Now there are actually two scholarship houses: one for girls, the other for guys. Everyone is assigned weekly chores and we eat our meals together. What I don’t yet know, all the guys are involved with a Christian group on campus called The Navigators.

“Would you like to walk?” Another neighbor asks. As we tread the miles she shared her son has a girlfriend. A first! “I am so not ready for this.”

When I asked if she’s talked with him about sex, she shared she’s thankful for a youth group he’s attending. “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 minds her daughter coming over for the art journal Bible club I host 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 asked, “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 was racing to TSA pre-check at Sarasota airport, thankful to have packing behind me and eager to dive into training the Rocky Mountain Navigator staff, 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 asks. “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...”

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

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

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?

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?



At dinner the first night one of the guys asks, "Is there anything we can pray for?" One of my new roommates says, "You can pray for me. I have to get this class to graduate and there are 300 people on the wait list."

The guys prayed and the next night she returned with an amazing story of how she got the class. 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 ever I had total assurance that 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!

So I truly did become a Christian my first week at the University of Florida. But it wasn't an event. When I saw the Engel Scale did this ever help me realize evangelism is a process. God was at work before I ever headed to campus.

	-12	-11	-10	-9	-8	-7	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0
Going their own way													
Aware of messenger													
Has positive attitude toward messenger													
Aware of difference in messenger													
First aware of Bible's relevance to life													
Has positive attitude toward Bible													
Aware of basics of the Gospel													
Understands meaning and implications of Gospel													
Has positive attitude toward Gospel													
Recognizes personal need													
Decides to act													
Repents and believes													
New Creature in Christ!													

What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?

How does your story relate to the Engle Scale*?

*(Note: This scale is designed to represent 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.)

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

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

How does His story relate to your story?

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

My friend is beautiful. A few days prior she was talking with a neighbor about restaurants they enjoyed. When she shared one she's 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."

"No way!"

"Yes, it's like God was saying, 'you don't like Moses' wife being black? I'm going to make you whiter than you've ever been!' And she could no longer live with the people since leprosy is contagious, so she had to live outside the camp and experienced what it was like to be excluded because of her color.

God hates prejudice! He is the one who created us with such beautiful variety."

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

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?

How could this attitude impact your sharing of the reason for the hope you have?

“Excusez 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 newsprint, 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 Colette," she offered as we walked to the class, which started 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 had 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." "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, Colette 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 spend 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 Colette, then dialoging 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.

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

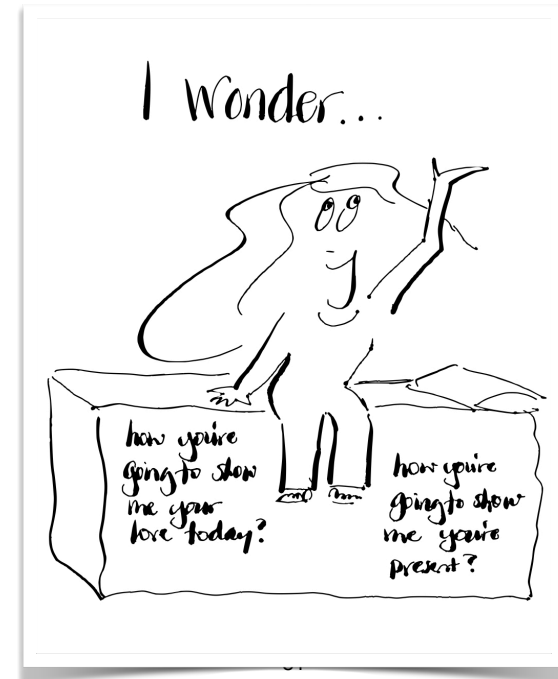
She remembered what we talked about and was turning to the Lord for help!

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 the Covid Crisis!



One day while I was walking and praying shortly after the Covid pandemic began, a neighbor pulled up in her car and began sharing 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 some 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.

This pandemic is 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's been such a privilege getting to address these fears, while helping these 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 asks, "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 is taking on new meaning!

What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?

What needed to be left behind in order to join Jesus in reaching out? What do you think that was like?

Read Matthew 4:18-25. In this passage, who follows Jesus?

What was the difference between the two sets of brothers and the large crowd?

According to Matthew 4:19, what is Jesus' responsibility and what is ours?

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

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



4

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

When I met Margaret, a senior involved with CRU, we discovered we both love to dance. 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 think, to lose weight . . . “I’m in!”

We put up fliers announcing our class, to be held twice a week at 9 am in the basement of North Hall. Margaret would teach Tuesdays, I would 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 showed up. I recognized her. She was in my introduction to speech disorders class. Sweat pours down as we moved to the music, but not only because we were dancing: the basement is not air conditioned. As we shook, lunged, and twirled, I prayed she would come to know Jesus.

Weeks went by. Ashley was still the only one coming. One Thursday a new friend asked after our shared anthropology class, “Want to go get some yogurt?” Yes, I’m supposed to go teach aerobics, but hey, this is still reaching out, I reason. And yogurt sure sounds better than sweating.

The next Wednesday, I ran into Margaret. “Ashley said you didn’t show Thursday?”

I mumble some excuse, Margaret presses 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 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 Ashley stops coming. Soon, the whole thing fizzles.

Oh well, at least we tried.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read Jeremiah 33:3. How do these verses relate to sharing hope?

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?



25

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 each run 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 was praying, 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'm like - what? We've only just started interacting!

But sure enough, as I head back into our cul-de-sac my neighbor comes out to walk her dog and asked if I will pray for her! After I do, 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 from her, "My company just let 400 people go. I am out of a job. Can I come see that illustration?"

She has never read the Bible before. For two hours I share the bridge illustration answering her questions, dialoging about the gospel. When I asked, "Where would you place yourself on this illustration." She picked it 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! And honestly, 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 about showing her the bridge illustration!

From Henry Blackaby I learned to ask, "Where are you at work God?" and "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!

Fast forward seven years. I am married and seven months pregnant, heading into my first Lamaze class.

As Jim and I walked in, I gasped! There's that girl! Ashley! The one, the only one, who came to that 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 she decided to take Lamaze again.

As we talked we discovered that not only did we live near each other, we both love cooking. "Any chance you'd like to get together once a month to cook our way around the world?" I asked. She was so 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 become believers? Ashley 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

What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Have you ever experienced failure in your attempts to share Jesus with others around you? What did that look like? How did you feel?

Read Romans 8:28. How does the truth of this passage relate to our failures?

How does it relate to your story?

What thoughts come to mind as you consider this?

What impact can knowing this have on you as you seek to share the reason for the hope you have?

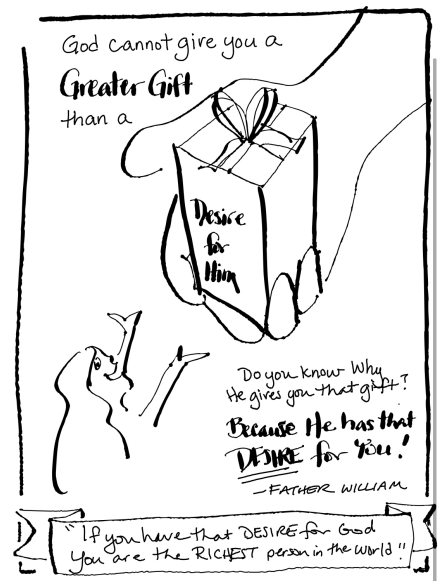
GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read John 5:17. How do these verses relate to sharing hope?

What thoughts come to mind when you consider God is always at work in people's lives even before you begin to share with them?

What impact can knowing this have on you sharing the gospel with people around you?



She'd come home from school most days to find a few dollars on a table so she could go to McDonald's and get herself dinner. Her dad usually didn't come home until the early hours of the morning totally drunk.

When she was sixteen, he informed her he was getting remarried and his new wife didn't want Olivia around so he kicked her out of the house.

She dropped out of school, spent the next two years living in her car, working two jobs to save enough money to get a place to live. She took showers at a nearby truck stop, drying her hair with the hand dryer.

Eventually she finished school and even put herself through college, but married a guy who was physically abusive. She had two kids with him and finally was able to get them all away from him.

Her son was a college student doing well. Her daughter got involved with a bad crowd and was struggling with a severe drug addiction. Olivia often had no idea where she was.

Olivia knew she needed help, but was hesitant to go to any church because she knew so little about the Bible.

She shared how when she hit rock bottom, she cried out to God, "If you really exist, do something to let me know." Before this she'd been working for another company as their office manager making \$80,000 a year.

When she came to interview at Tri County the only job available was as a receptionist but she shared, "When I walked in that front door I sensed this was where I needed to be. There are things in life far more important than money.

Then Jim started offering the Bible discussion group and I knew beyond a doubt God was answering my prayer! He definitely led me here!"

5

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 start asking 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 neat new ways to share Jesus with people!"

One friend told me about a guy who walks up to people during his lunch hour and asks, "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 smile. I can do this!

Later that day, walking across campus, I see a woman heading toward me on the same path. As she draws near, I smile and wave, she smiles back. Then I say, "Do you know that Jesus loves you?"

She stops in her tracks, eyes wide, then steely, her face morphing into stone. "I hope you know you ruined my day."

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

Scowling, she storms off. Even though I never see her again, I feel horrible.

Words so beautiful to me brought 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."

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 actually brought pain.

I never tried that approach again. Though I wonder, done in love . . .? I'm guessing that's how the gentleman who used this approach proceeded.

Maybe I should try again?

Approximately eighty per cent of the employees who work for the company my husband runs are not believers. So Jim decided to offer an investigative Bible discussion during lunch one day a week for anyone who wanted to know more about God. Five people showed up. He was so encouraged seeing their eagerness.

During the second meeting Jim shared the Bridge illustration, beginning with Creation. One of the employees had never heard of Adam and Eve before.

Most of Tri County Air Conditioning's employees are men, however in the office there are more women working. Jim came home one night and declared, "We need to get you in there so you can come alongside the women who are searching." He decided to have me start coaching the mid-level management through their CliftonStrengths results.

I offered an introductory workshop for the six rising leaders and started the time having them share a quiet time in Psalm 139. It was fascinating to see, even those who didn't know God still had much to share.

When I showed up to coach Olivia for the third time I asked how she was doing. She shared, "It's been a rough week. One of my friends died this past weekend."

When she shared her friend believed in Jesus, I share about the hope he has because of the gospel.

As we started talking about this she references back to when Jim shared the Bridge illustration during lunch, and stated, "I know I'm on the dark side."

When I asked where she wanted to be, she said, "On God's side!" And right then, she prayed committing her life to the Lord.

As Olivia shared her story I was even more amazed.

She'd gone on vacation with a friend when she was eight and came home to an empty house. At first she thought they'd been robbed, but then discovered her mom left taking all the furniture and her sister with her. Olivia was left behind with her alcoholic father.

Who was I supposed to be available to?

My friend Jean Fleming encouraged me I needed to set boundaries. Luna was incapable of honoring them and eventually stopped coming over.

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

And I sensed him reply, "You mean you want to be me?"

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read Psalm 16:5-11. How do these verses relate to sharing hope?

What role should boundaries play in sharing the gospel?



GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Have you ever tried to share the gospel without love? What happened?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. According to this passage what happens if we try to share Jesus with people without love?

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 with out 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.

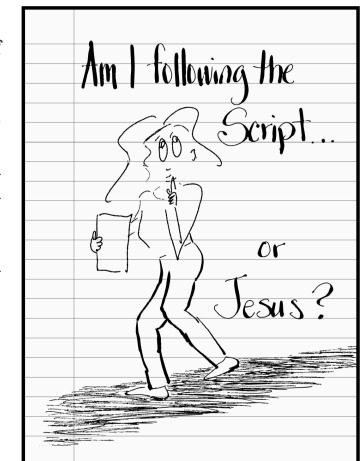
But then he told us to put a one to the left of our zeros and asked, "Now what is it worth/".

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).

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



My friends who had gone to the Navigator conference 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 said people are off-the-charts eager to do this."

I had three really 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. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

Stink! I didn't really know what that meant. I figured I better start somewhere else.

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

When Brittany, Emma, and Lisa arrived at my dorm, I handed them each a Bible. "Let's turn to the book of Romans." I helped them find it. "How about we read the first chapter? We'll each read a paragraph and after we finish reading this, 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. . . ."

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

Yikes! I thought, knowing all three women were sexually active. I should have thought this through . . .

Emma shook her head. "I think I like her version of Christianity better than yours."

Our neighborhood is the last one before farm country starts. I love to walk and pray in the wide open spaces. One day I saw 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 out 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, "Hey! Whatcha doing?" After I shared I was walking and praying, I asked if she had anything she'd like me to pray for.

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

She'd come from a very rough background, was barely literate and unable to drive anything but a golf cart. The place she lived was rather scary.

Her partner's brother, who lived in a trailer outside, often tripped out. There were huge "No Trespassing" signs posted and dogs roamed the property freely. I decide to invite 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, right as my husband came home for dinner. He was hungry as he often works through lunch handling problems.

I put food on the table so Jim could eat and Luna and I went into another room to read and talk. We shared such great time in the Word!

But then this kept happening.

I invited her to eat with us. But she wasn't hungry, just slow I guess to get out the door.

Jim was really getting frustrated and I felt caught in the middle.

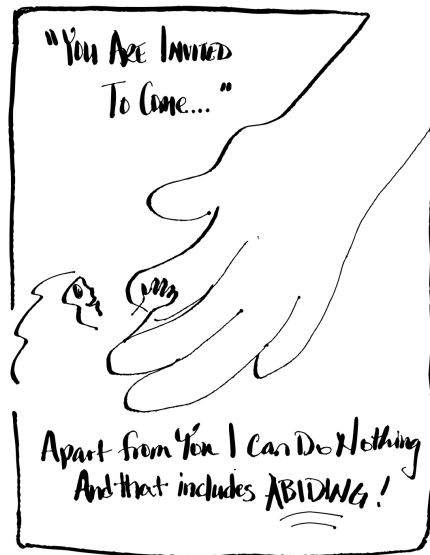
Luna was so eager to read and discuss the Bible, but seemed incapable of coming when invited and showed up at times that were killing me caring for my husband.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read Acts 10:1-35. What barrier does Peter have to deal with in order to be available to share the gospel with Cornelius?

Are there any barriers standing in the way of you sharing the reason for your hope with others around you?



As she stood, Lisa 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. "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. If only I'd asked earlier . . . but I didn't want to appear ignorant.

Pride really does go before a fall.

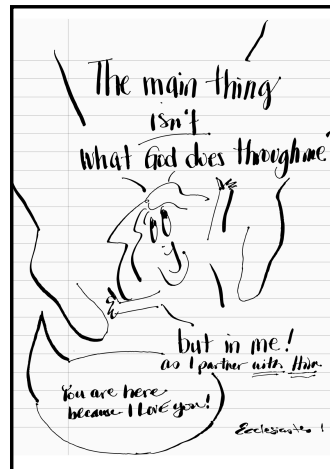
I've since learned you don't have to know a lot to reach out. Consider how Jesus told the former demoniac from whom He cast out legions of demons, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you." But reaching out to share hope is also a skill that can be developed.

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.

What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?

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?

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?



The first time I went to have lunch with my neighbor Evelyn, 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 shared she's had people walk out when she's told them that.

We enjoyed a wonderful two hours together. For being an atheist she has 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. She says she doesn't believe He exists, but she sure likes getting together and says she really enjoys the time.

One month Evelyn 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.

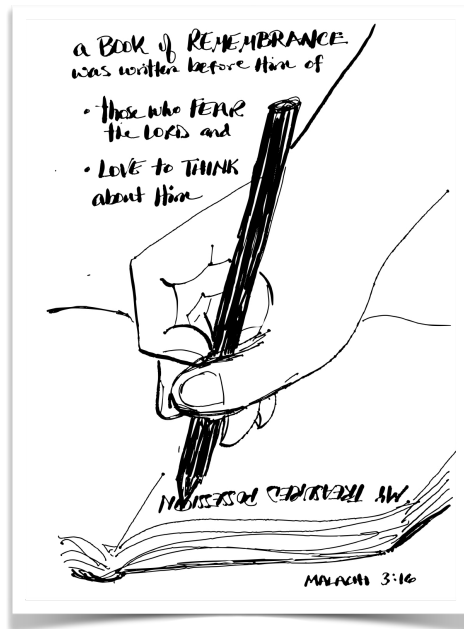
In the prelude he shares an incredible story of how he miraculously escapes death, actually multiple miracles take place that save his life, and he concludes, "All luck."

Another time T.S. Elliot's book Middlemarch results in one of our deepest spiritual discussions and I am able to share much of the gospel with her. As we talk, Jesus is so present and so at work drawing her to Himself. But then she backpedals and her walls go back up.

How 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!

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read Genesis 1. What could you learn about God from this chapter of the Bible if you never knew anything about him before?



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

“There’s this girl at the gym who keeps asking spiritual questions. Would you be willing to meet with her?” I’ve been meeting with Joy 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 Kerri bit into her burger, I jumped right in. “So Joy tells me you’re interested in spiritual things?”

Kerri 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’d 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 Julie, 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 Kerri spent the next hour teaching us nutrition. I learned so much!

Five months in, Kerri 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 commanding 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 kept 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 Kerri 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, praying.

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

That fall, for Kerri's birthday, they decided to head to North Carolina for a romantic weekend away. By this point Kerri 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 Dave 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 Dave 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 after, Dave prayed to receive Christ.

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

And I shared how this brought 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 we are both living in Tampa.

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

We met for the rest of the semester, each week focusing on another chapter in Genesis, but something strange was happening. Each week as we were in the Word I saw the longing in her heart to surrender to the Lord but it was like something was blocking her. Week after week I saw her drawing closer but then sadly walking away.

Oh Lord! I prayed, What is going on?

The next year God "sets" Jim and I in Tallahassee, so we stopped meeting. 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'd 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.

I cannot begin to tell you how powerfully the Lord met her. He revealed the roots of her "addiction" to always needing 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 not only became free from always needing a guy in her life, she became free to surrender to Jesus! It was one of the most unbelievable life changes I've seen.

Ten years later she is still walking with Jesus!

saying, "Hi! I'm God! I'm omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, sovereign..." instead 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 let's 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!" She exclaimed.

"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 each 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?"

Did we ever have a great discussion on that!

"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 do this she shares she focused on the word "Said." She's a speech pathology and audiology major. "Every time God speaks, what ever he says happens. And this happens over and over and over again."

And we discussed what difference it could 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 it was one degree further away we'd freeze. It is so mind-blowing to consider how detailed God is.

The next year, Kerri 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."

Kerri touched her arm, and shared "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, Kerri is still investing in women around her! And her husband Dave became a teaching elder in his church.

What a mighty God we serve!

What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read Isaiah 55:8-11. How does this passage of Scripture relate to the story?

How does it relate to your story?

What difference can knowing Isaiah 55:8-9 make as you share the gospel with others around you?



“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 the next Fall 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. And now drugs were starting to look good...

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, familiar with Bible stories, especially the New Testament? Was I ever surprised when the Lord laid it on my heart to go through the book of Genesis with her.

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

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

What did the Lord use to bring Camila to Himself? What do you learn about God from this?

Read James 5:16.
What do you learn about prayer from this verse?

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



She'd once been beautiful. Soft, fair skin; blonde hair; lively eyes . . . but those hands! In her thirties she woke up one morning to find them swollen. Eventually the swelling subsided, leaving her fingers twisted and contorted. Now in 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 to partner 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 together and invite Rita 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 Rita 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 as 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 Rita!"

The next day Rita 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 her what time that happened, can you believe it was right when I was 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!

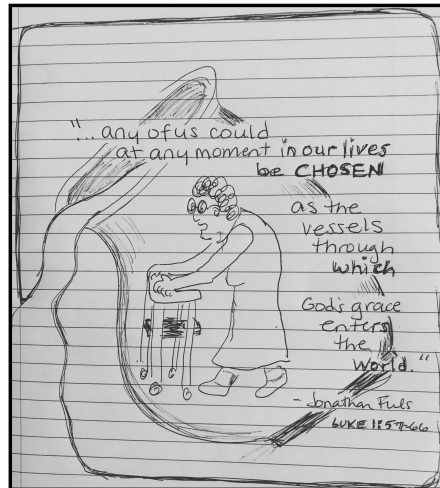
GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What do you learn about growing in sharing hope from this story?

Read Psalm 139:13-16. How much care went into God's creation of you?

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?

What difference can knowing Psalm 139:13-16 make as God prompts you to share Him with others around you?



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

Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth
Would care to know my name
Would care to feel my hurt?
Who am I, that the bright and morning star
Would choose to light the way
For my ever wandering heart?

Not because of who I am
But because of what You've done
Not because of what I've done
But because of who You are

I am a flower quickly fading
Here today and gone tomorrow
A wave tossed in the ocean
A vapor in the wind
Still You hear me when I'm calling
Lord, You catch me when I'm falling
You've told me who I am
I am Yours

The next day Camila was at home pondering the question, Who am I? She'd grown up Catholic. Become a party girl. Was 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!

Today, Benjamin is a pastor and Camila is a mom of three, still walking with Jesus.

At the start of his Senior year, one of our key student leaders, Benjamin, announced, “I am tired of fighting lust. I’ve decided to give in to it.”

The guy who’d been discipling him was shocked but responded with grace. “Let me know if you ever want to talk.”

“Yeah, right.” Flippantly the student turned and walked away.

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

I placed my hand on her shoulder, “Now we’ll have opportunity to see if he truly is a believer. If he is, he won’t be able to keep going in this. 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 Benjamin. 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 was now living with. They’d be laughing, cuddling, continuing on their way.

We kept praying.

Nine months later Benjamin asked to get together, “I am absolutely miserable! I thought giving in to my lust would help. It’s only made it a thousand times worse!”

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

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 Camila come to know Jesus.

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

After Jim and I had been married for two years we 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 garages and close the doors. We weren’t getting 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 up 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 really hit it off. 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 Tom and Mia they decided to join too. Tom had some church background, but this was all new for Mia.

When Mia 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’d have progressive dinners where we’d go from house to house eating and enjoying each others’ company.

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

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about growing in sharing hope from this story?

Read Romans 2:4. What role does kindness play in people coming to know the Lord?

What role can creative kindness play in our sharing of Jesus with others around us?



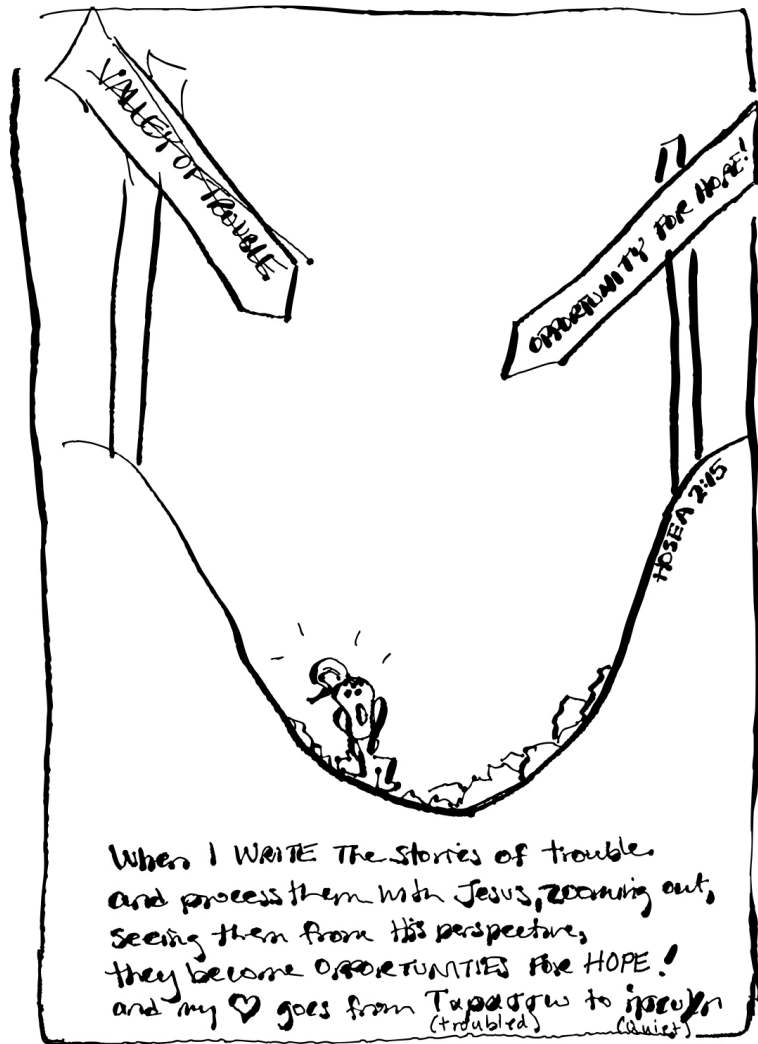
GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read Matthew 11:28-30. Are there any sharing hope failures you need to process with Jesus?

Do you ever take responsibility for people around you?

If so, what could it look like to repent of this and trust them to God?



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 me 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 discipling 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!

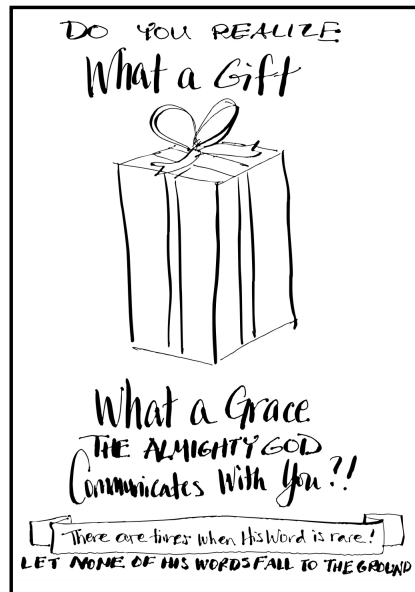
GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?

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?

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?

How do these verses relate to your 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.

So I soon 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 but also how to better live in 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 for ever. As they graduate or move on, this 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 the 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.

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."

"Rebuke the demon in Jesus' name!" The guy cried out.

She did and the demon left. "At that moment, I knew God was real." Turned out the guy was the son of a baptist preacher. He shared about 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 so 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 to find him. He did. The detective found him in jail for tax evasion. He also found he had a wife and children.

Devastated Amber 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 started 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 Amber, who recoiled, "No way! I am not giving up sex!" Sex was the only way Amber 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 Amber 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, "Deb, am I not big enough to have continued the story?"

11

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 asked. She shook her head, "First time ever doing this." I nodded, "For me, too. We just moved to town." As we continued talking, I learned she recently became a Christian.

I shared, "After I became a Christian, I started meeting with this woman who showed me a simple way to keep growing in knowing Jesus. It doesn't take a lot of time but has 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 she'd been having an affair with the store manager. 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 30 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.

What do you learn about sharing hope from this story?

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 t

How do these verses relate to your story?

We'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 shared with her my surprise that Amber hadn't shown up.

"Have you checked the other Starbucks?"

There were two Starbucks on campus? I had no idea!

"Yes, It's on the other side of campus. In the library."

As I raced across campus a text came in. "Guess I'm not important enough for you to meet me. Maybe our paths will cross another time." Oh God, I prayed, Please don't let her leave!

My knees were killing me, but I raced on until the library was in sight. I caught her as she was heading to 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 with her how much money she could make stripping. She loved to dance, so figured why not?

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

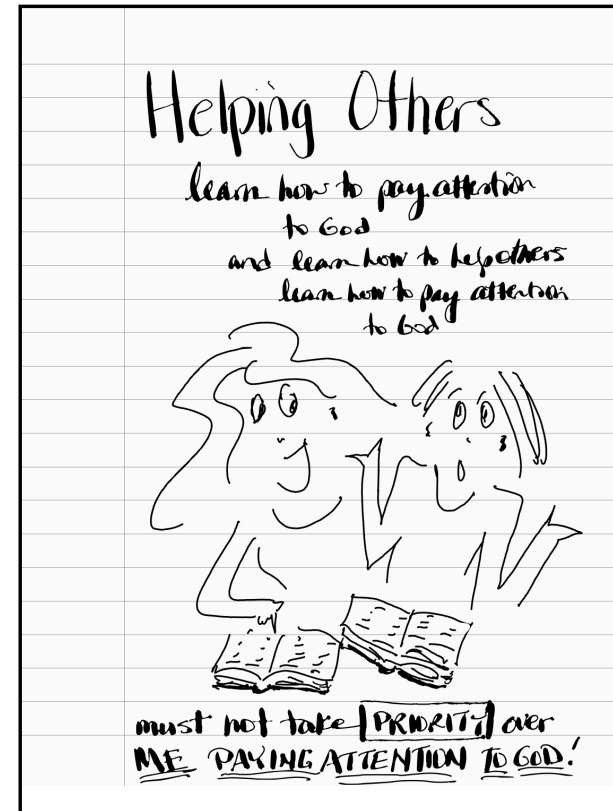
"They thought I was dead when they scraped me off the floor." Stripping is illegal in Tallahassee so she couldn't report what happened. She moved from FSU to Tampa where stripping is legal so she could be protected,

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:4. Why is it important to know this when you are sharing the gospel with people?

How can knowing this reality help you grow in sharing Jesus with others' around you?



12

Shortly after we moved to Venice, Florida, and started 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. Marie 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 Marie 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 excited!

I wondered why I never thought to contact a church secretary before? When people start getting 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!

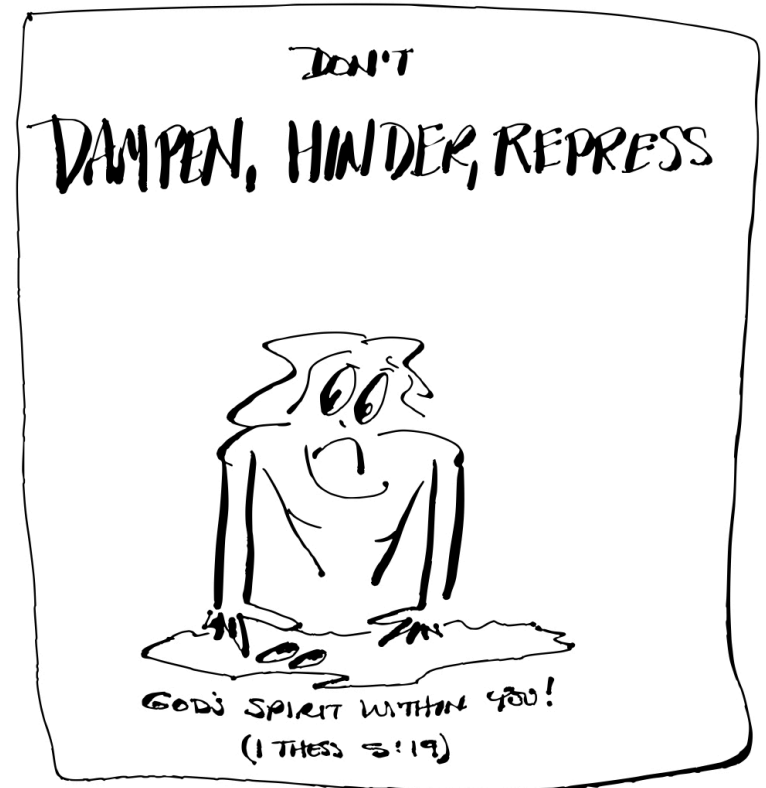
After we finished sharing that quiet time together, I asked, "Amelia, would you like to get together again and read a story of how Jesus interacted with a woman in the Bible?"

A smile lights her face, "I'd love that!"

Right then, 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, Amelia was no longer blind.



"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 Amelia starts 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 it through again to myself for a verse to stand out to me. Wanna try that?":

She nods. So we re-read the Psalm to ourselves. After a few minutes of silence, I ask, "Was there a verse that caught your attention?"

"You know," Amelia shifts 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 suggests. So I do. Again, silence.

Amelia shook her head, "I'm really not connecting with anything in there either."

You better believe I am asking Jesus for help! I've never had anyone not find a verse before and now we're heading to a third passage?

So I flip to Psalm 19 and as soon as we read verse one, Amelia exclaims, "That's it! That's my verse!"

I heave a sign 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 shares about the song, it's beginning to dawn on me, I think she's blind.

Amelia may be reading the Scriptures but she is spiritually blind to their intended meaning. She may have served as an intern in a church, but she doesn't yet know Jesus.

So while she takes time to write down her verse and her thoughts, I am crying out to the Lord asking for wisdom to know how He wants me joining in with what He is doing. It's not happenstance she is here on this trip or that I am getting this time with her.

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read Jeremiah 29:11-13. What thoughts come to mind as you consider these words from the Lord?

How can knowing this impact your sharing the reason for the hope you have inside?



13

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 Frank and his wife.

I soon discovered Jane 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 Frank would tell.

When Frank was a teenager he ran away from home, hiding in rail cars as he traveled across the country. Eventually he ended up working 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 Frank 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, Frank 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!

"Frank, 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 Frank's face as hope rekindled. Not long after this, he surrendered his life to Jesus and was washed clean as snow.

"Exactly! You won't get much nourishment there. But what happens if you cut off one bite and chew it well?"

"Mmm mm!" Amelia 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."

Amelia laughed. "I hate making decisions!"

"Me too. Next to the word "listen" I start writing 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!"

Amelia raises 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."

Amelia leaned forward.

"Then, I always end my time asking Jesus, 'What do you want me to do in response?' It may be really 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 '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.

That's where this gets so 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 replies.

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

Amelia prays, "Hey God, we need snow. Could you please deliver?" And I ask the Lord to bless our ears and let us hear whatever He wants us to.

It was the fourth day of our spring break ski trip. With no snow in the forecast or on the mountains of West Virginia we took the morning to let the students enjoy time with Jesus. I was eager to get to know a new student who'd followed her boyfriend to Navigators. When I first met Amelia she shared she'd just finished interning as a youth leader at a church.

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

"Sure!" Amelia 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 to seek warm spots in the sun. Me? I was praying big time for snow!

I asked Amelia, "What do you usually do when you spend time with the Lord?"

She shrugged her shoulders, "Oh, 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!" Amelia is a gifted musician. She'd brought her guitar and was serenading us each evening while my deaf ears followed along as I read the lyrics on her laptop.

I shared with her how I used 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?"

Amelia started gagging, then pretended to pass out. She was quite the ham!

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Have you ever met someone who didn't have hope, who thought they were hopeless? How did you respond?

Read 1 Peter 3:15. What is the reason for the hope you have?

Why is it important for you to always be prepared to share this?

What can you do to better be prepared to share this?



When I turned 33 I decided I really wanted to read through the Bible. I'd been a Christian for 15 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 kept sharing new treasure I was finding with friends around me. On December 31 I was so excited as I finished the last chapter of Revelation. I'd done it! I'd read the whole Bible!

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

After hearing all the neat things I was discovering 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 1 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 got together 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 kept growing.

When we started Leviticus, two sisters showed up, wanting to join. 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 spiritually 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, too!

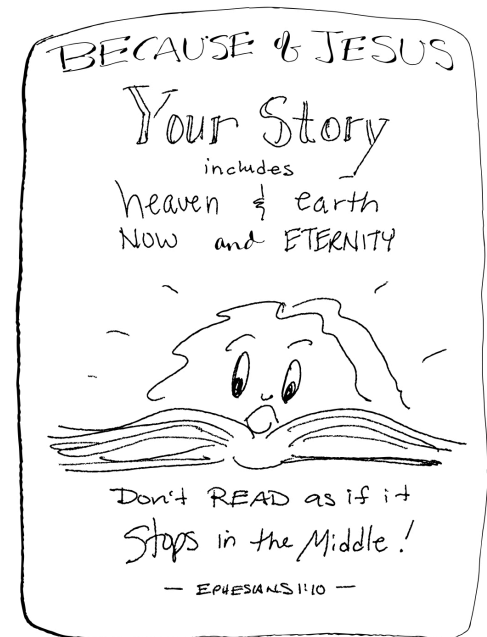
Did I ever learn that not only is all Scripture useful for believers, God can save anyone through any part of His Word . . . even Leviticus! Is He ever an amazing God!

What thoughts come to mind as you read this story?

How do you feel when you think about your weaknesses?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9

What was Paul's perspective about his weaknesses?



How can knowing this help you grow in sharing Jesus with others' around you?

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, Naomi, to meet with us the second time. As we headed back to my car, Naomi exclaimed, "Deb, it is such a blessing you can't hear! Whenever you ask a question that hits too close to home she responds with something totally off the wall like, "I'd really like to be having sex with my boyfriend right now." But because you can't hear, you just keep asking, "Min, would you mind repeating that?" And by the fifth time she was answering your question!"

I ended up meeting with Min for four years.

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

As I got to know Min I discovered she came from a difficult background. Her mom once told her, "I should have aborted you." As she grew up, no one listened to or paid much 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 even 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 Min became a Christian—and so did her boyfriend!

GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

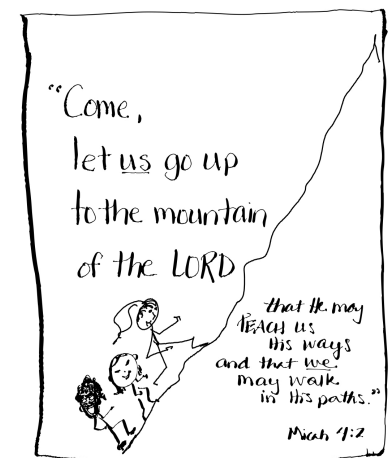
What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

What do you learn about God from this story?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What do you learn about God's Word from this verse?

What role does God's Word play in you sharing hope?

How can you better incorporate God's Word when you are sharing with friends who don't yet know Jesus?



15

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. So 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 re-start 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 single 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 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 have to start everything from scratch?! What are You thinking?”

Then, one 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. How in the world would I follow the conversation?

I will never forget driving to Rachel’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 that 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.

17

“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 knew where the next lead for students might 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 said she would. I agreed to meet her at a picnic table in front of her dorm.

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

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

I would ask a question and when she responded, I’d have no clue what she’d said. “Min, I’m sorry, would you mind repeating that?”

She spoke again. Still I had no idea what she was saying.

“I’m sorry Min. Would you mind speaking a little louder?”

She answered again.

“Min, I really want to hear your response, would you mind lifting your face a bit so I can read your lips better?”

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

As we climbed into the car, I heard Ziyo say to himself, "Wow. 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.

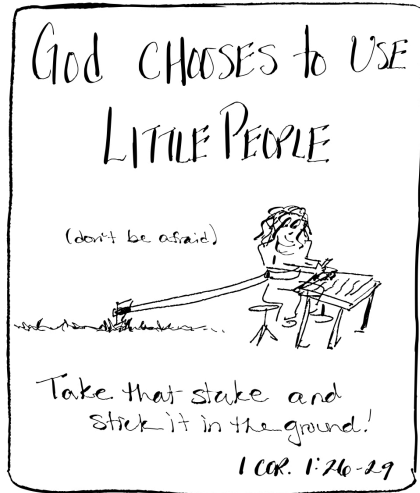
GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

In what ways have you helped others experience God's love and care for them?

Read John 16:24. What role can prayer play in reaching out to others around you with the hope of the gospel?

How can knowing what God's promised in John 16:24 help you grow in sharing Jesus with others' around you?



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 pretty obvious they weren't even certain they wanted to be there.

I stammered. "I don't know if Rachel 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."

Valeria taught all of us so much! I still use her guidelines today.

Heading home after that first study, I sensed the Lord saying, "Deb, 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 come back. 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 had purpose in 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 to him I sensed the Lord saying, "Don't you see, Deb? I didn't want that happening 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 directly appearing to him!

As we age, it's so easy to get comfortable and for our world to get 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. And 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.

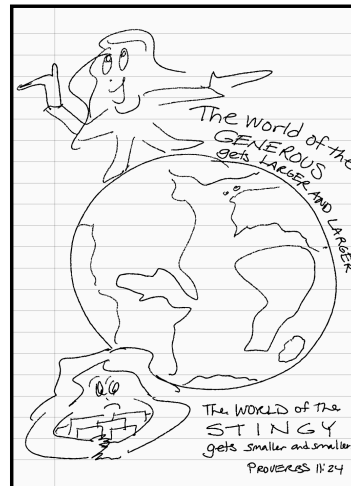
GROWING IN SHARING HOPE

What can you learn about sharing hope from this story?

Read 2 Corinthians 9:8. What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

How does the truth of this verse relate to you sharing the gospel?

How can knowing this help you grow in sharing hope with others?



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 just 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 Ziyu didn't speak English. That night broke the ice.

Soon Ziyu 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 Ziyu would repeat, "Lizard!"

About a year later Andrew received a scooter for Christmas. When Ziyu saw it, he really wanted one, too. So he saved up 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. It was the hot new toy everyone wanted. But a couple months later . . .

We went to one store. No scooters. Then I drove to a second store. No scooters. 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." Ziyu 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." Ziyu was skeptical, but Andrew was all in, "Dear God, would you please provide a scooter for Ziyu. 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 in here?"

Andrew raced through the aisles with Ziyu 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!