

## CHAPTER 1

# ONLY ONE CHANCE TO BE YOUNG!

To be honest, I didn't want to write this book. I casually brought up the idea to my family around the dinner table one day, unsure of what they would think. A couple days later, my dad invited me to join him as he was sitting on a lawn chair reading in the backyard. He told me he thought a book on witnessing was a great idea and that I should move ahead with this project. As we began to discuss it, I actually started to cry. (I think my dad was a little surprised by my reaction!) I just felt that writing a book on witnessing was such an impossible mountain to climb. However, the more I worked on it, the more excited I became, and the more I saw God using this project to change *me*.

If you are a typical person, witnessing scares you. Maybe it terrifies you. I remember how my stomach used to tie itself in knots at the thought of witnessing. Being nervous isn't necessarily a bad thing; it has some benefits. It keeps us humble and dependent on God. But I have found that what I once considered to be very scary has become much easier with practice. I think Satan wants us to believe that witnessing will be a miserable, frightening experience, when actually it is one of the most exciting parts of our lives in Christ! It is my prayer that this book would provide practical ideas and encouragement to my generation as we endeavor—together—to speak the gospel of Jesus Christ with boldness.

### LEXI'S BAD DREAM

One of my favorite places to share the gospel is at a little playground a block from our house. One summer day I began talking with a twelve-year-old girl

named Lexi who was swinging by herself.

“Do you ever think about what happens when we die?” I asked her.

Lexi told me that she thought about it sometimes, but didn’t know the answer about what happens. As I explained what the Bible says about Heaven and Hell, Lexi said something that really surprised me.

“Just last night I had a dream that I died and went to Hell,” she told me in a serious tone of voice.

*Wow. Seriously?* I was thinking.

“Do you think it’s interesting that you dreamed that last night and then ran into me today?” I asked her.

Lexi did think it was interesting and, more importantly, she wanted to know how to go to Heaven. As we sat there on the swings, rubbing our feet around in the woodchips, we talked for over 30 minutes about sin, Jesus, and how we can *know* that we will go to Heaven one day.

It is easy to believe the lie that no one will want to listen to us if we start talking about Jesus—that people just won’t be interested. Or maybe we imagine that we will offend people if we try to witness to them. We forget that God is working in this world, preparing hearts for the gospel. He simply desires servants who are willing to go into the harvest and reap! The truth is that many *are* seeking, but we won’t know that unless we talk with them. Jesus said, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few” (Luke 10:2).

## OUR GENERATION

It was a busy Saturday afternoon and the local mall was full of activity—with the typical combination of serious shoppers, mall walkers, and teens just hanging out. Adding yet more variety to the mixture, a group of about eight friends and I had arranged to meet at the mall to try to get into witnessing conversations. We prayed and asked God to lead us to open hearts.

“What do you think happens when you die?” my friend Jenn and I asked three girls.

They looked at each other with surprised expressions. “We were just talking about this the other night!” they exclaimed. “We have these long debates about what happens when we die, but it never goes anywhere because no one has any answers!”

These girls represent the sad state of millions in our generation. They need answers desperately. If you know Jesus Christ, then you have the one answer they need. It’s an answer they do not even know exists—and you *have* it!

It goes without saying that the world around us is a mess. You have heard statistics about suicide, abortion, murder, crime, drugs and divorce. There are approximately 6,000 first-run theaters in this country and about 400,000

churches.<sup>1</sup> Yet which do you think is influencing our country more? Are we as Christians truly being the bright lights, the strong voices of truth, that we should be? The solution for this world's confusion is not to fix all the surface problems, however devastating and shocking they may be. Neither is the answer found in political or social improvements. The answer is for individual people to be brought to Jesus Christ and disciplined. This means that individual Christians—each of us—need to be faithfully sharing the gospel, teaching others what God has taught us, and encouraging our friends to do the same.

## OVERFLOW

Jesus said that we will be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). What is a witness? A witness is simply one who reports what he has seen to those who did not see it—just as in court, witnesses are brought before the jury. Being a witness is all Jesus asked us to do. He never asked us to convert people because that's not our job, nor are we capable of it. We are only witnesses. Since Jesus is infinitely better than any description of Him we could give, it's a challenge—but a thrilling challenge—to report what we've seen. And, of course, there is still so much about Jesus we haven't seen! But if you have come to Him, you can introduce someone else to Him too. Right after Andrew met Jesus, he found his brother, Simon, and brought him to Jesus (John 1:40-42).

Think about this. If you see a breathtaking view, you are anxious to describe it to someone else. If you hear a fascinating story, you want to retell it. It brings fulfillment—and even increases your delight in it—to share it with someone else. Sharing the gospel should be the overflow of our delight in our Savior. Jesus said that when we come to Him to drink, our lives will overflow with living water for others. “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38).

The more time we spend with Jesus—learning about Him, worshiping Him, thinking about the cross—the more we will overflow with fresh insights and joy. People watch us and want to know if we are genuine. When witnessing is the overflow of our delight in Jesus, others will be able to see that what we are saying is *real* in our lives.

Let's zoom way out for a minute. Imagine that you are standing by the crystal clear river in Heaven (Revelation 22:1), say, 2,000 years from now. You are thinking about the short life you lived on earth. Maybe you reminisce about the many things you did that really didn't accomplish anything. Then you think about the people you led to Jesus and your heart throbs with joy. Looking back on your life from that heavenly perspective, it won't

matter how popular you were, what you looked like, or how comfortable your life was here on earth. The one thing that will matter is what *Jesus* thought of how you lived your life. So let's start living with that as our focus right now.

## ADVANTAGES OF BEING YOUNG

“People will listen to you because you are young,” someone once stressed to me, encouraging me to share the gospel. I have come to realize how right he was. Adults are curious about young people and enjoy conversing with us. They are not intimidated by us—they are intrigued. The world *caters* to young people. Just look at how the media and the shopping industry revolve around the rising generation. We, as young people, have a voice.

“Do you need to plug that in?” a friendly, older lady at a local coffee shop asked me as I was setting up my laptop. She was sitting at a nearby table.

“I think it will be okay on battery for awhile. Thank you, though,” I replied.

“Do you *like* working on that?” she asked.

I nodded and smiled.

“You *do*?” she said. “Let me ask you something,” she continued, lowering her voice to almost a whisper. “What is texting? I hear everyone talking about it—saying that young people do it all the time!”

“Oh, you do that on your phone,” I told her, pulling out my cell phone.

“Isn't that amazing!” she marveled, shaking her head.

“It can actually be sort of a waste of time,” I remarked with a smile.

“I love observing young people and the things they do,” she exclaimed.

“We didn't even have a phone in our house when I grew up.”

She then asked what I was doing in life. This gave me the opportunity to share about some ministry activities and led into a conversation about spiritual things.

I was surprised to run into this same lady again the following week. I was even more surprised when she pulled out the tract I had given her and told me that she had been showing it to her friends! Notice that this all started because she enjoyed talking with a young person.

## THE PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR

*He looks like an interesting person,* I thought as I saw a tall, middle-aged man with a suit coat and brightly colored tennis shoes sitting on a bench. I was at a local college helping with an outreach event and hoping to get into witnessing conversations.

“Hello,” I said as I sat down next to him on the bench.

“Hello,” he said, returning a friendly smile.

“Are you from the college here?” I asked.

“Yes, I’m the philosophy professor,” he replied.

*What did I just get myself into?* I wondered.

“Oh, okay!” I said. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Sure!” he said.

“Do you consider yourself to be a good person?” I asked.

Intrigued by the question, he thought for a minute. Then he said, “Yes, I do.”

“There is a ‘good person test’ that you can take to see if you really *are* a good person. Would you like to try it?” I asked.

“Hmmm ... ” he hesitated.

There was a lady sitting on the other side of him who had introduced herself as the school counselor and a local pastor.

“I’d like to hear you try it,” she told him.

“Okay,” he agreed.

“All right, the first question is, have you ever told a lie?”

He said he had.

We continued to talk through some of the Ten Commandments. (I like to bring up the Ten Commandments in conversations because it’s a way to help people understand sin.)

“So, if you stood before God and He judged you by the Ten Commandments, would you be innocent or guilty?” I asked.

“I suppose I’d be guilty,” he said.

“So, since you don’t know when you will die, *if* there is a God, shouldn’t it be your number one priority to make sure you are right with Him? There is just so much at stake!”

“I like to think of myself as a pretty good person,” he said again.

“One reason I like to share the Ten Commandments with people is because they show us how we really appear to God,” I explained. “Compared to other people, we may feel that we are pretty good. But compared to God’s perfect holiness we look pretty bad. A sheep may look white against the green grass, but when it snows he looks pretty dirty.”

The professor seemed to like the simple analogy. He continued, “I’m far from perfect—but I suppose I don’t see myself so bad as deserving of Hell.”

“Well, no one *has* to go to Hell. People choose to. God provided a way of escape for anyone who wants it ... ” I explained.

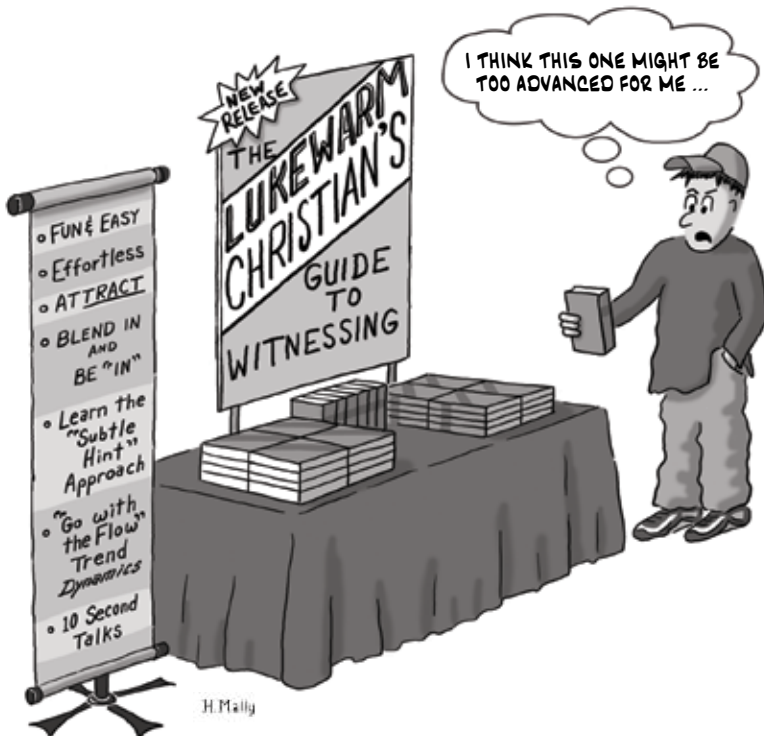
So here was a secular philosophy professor and a liberal woman pastor talking with a conservative Christian homeschooler—and we were all enjoying

the controversial conversation. We talked for over 30 minutes about a lot of different issues. They seemed to think of me as just another student and they didn't mind listening to my "interesting ideas." I probably got away with saying a lot more without offending them than an older person could have. Sure, I didn't give the philosophy professor all the intellectual answers that others could have given, but I realized that I didn't need to. The gospel itself is very simple, and because I was young, the professor didn't expect me to give him scores of eloquent and persuasive scientific arguments. That's another advantage of witnessing when you are young. People know that we are *still young*. There is a lot we don't know yet! (That's not to say we shouldn't prepare. We will talk about this in chapter eight.)

Now is the time to get practice and experience in talking with people about the gospel. The more we do, the more we will learn what the world around us is thinking and believing—and the more we will be motivated to study in order to have good answers to their questions. By the time we are older, think how much experience we will have!

Another reason to witness now is that while we are young we usually do not make people uncomfortable. They don't feel threatened.

Since many young people today are immature, irresponsible, and apathetic,



adults notice a distinct contrast when they see a young person who takes a stand for truth and articulates what he or she believes. This alone can make a strong statement. It causes adults to think, *Here is a young person who is different. They have purpose and maturity. What is different about them?*

## **WASTING YOUR LIFE STARTS NOW**

Let's recap: There are many definite advantages to witnessing when we are young. Adults are not intimidated by us. Young people are more willing to talk with someone their own age. We can get practice without being expected to know all the answers. We have the opportunity to stand out with clear contrast to the typical young people of this world. We have energy. We have time. We have enthusiasm. No wonder Satan wants to distract young people from doing God's work! Think of all the young people whom God used in Scripture: Joseph, Samuel, David, Daniel and his friends, King Josiah, Jeremiah, Naaman's servant girl, Esther, and Timothy, to name a few. We should never believe the lie that we cannot be powerful for the Lord when we are young! Scripture says just the opposite. It says young people are to be an *example* to the believers. "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). In other words, we should be so responsible and mature that no one would have any reason to think little of or disregard our youthfulness. More than that, we should be an example of Christlikeness.

Of course, there are also advantages of being older and having the wisdom that comes from years of experience. But we will not get that experience if we do not start witnessing now.

## **DEVOTION TO OUR COMMANDER**

I believe that one of the last things Satan wants is a host of young people who are excited about witnessing! Thankfully, we have a Commander who is much stronger than Satan, and He cannot be defeated. It is out of love for Him that we devote ourselves to His work. We love Him because He first loved us.

God created a perfect world, but man rebelled and turned away from Him. God would have been justified in destroying the whole human race because of our rebellion against Him. But He chose the path of mercy instead because "He delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18). None of us can fully understand how horrible our sin is to God, but we get a snapshot of it when we see how much it cost Jesus on the cross.

## The Cost

I imagined myself as a spectator watching a scene unfold before my eyes. First, I saw a man who was helping others—yet not simply in the way that any man might help someone else. This was much different. It was as if tenderness and kindness were just flowing out of him. I could tell He was a good man—GOOD in a way that I had never seen before. Every single thing He did was good. His face was so pure. I had never seen honesty like that, never seen love like that. It's like I finally knew what love was—now that I saw Him. All I wanted to do was to keep watching Him because everything He did was so amazing. Even the simple, normal acts of service that He was doing—I was astonished by them ... by Him, I mean. The way He spoke ... I could just tell He was right, that He spoke the truth, that everything He said was right by definition. And the way He looked at people. I wished He would look at me, but He never did. I was just a spectator. But I knew I would never forget this goodness that I had seen. It was almost as if I was in a daze, not quite able to comprehend it, stunned that this kind of righteousness could even exist. I wanted to just keep watching Him. I felt that I would be content if I could simply watch Him for the rest of my life.

But then suddenly the scene changed before my eyes. I didn't want to believe what I was seeing. People were looking at Him with angry stares. It was more than mere anger; it was rage. He was looking back at them with such ... such ... I don't even know the word ... it was as if He was on a totally different playing field. There was such tenderness in His eyes. A touch of sorrow, an ocean of love. Their rage turned into vehement shouting and accusations, and then I began to watch the most horrible scene of my life. The whips they were holding were cruel and the scourging unbearable to watch. But how could this be? He was so good, so pure, so tender. He was the best person I had ever known. This must stop. I tried to yell out for someone to help, for someone to stop this. But I realized, again, I was only a spectator. Lash after lash. Blow after blow. I couldn't look—especially because it was *Him*. It was the worst possible injustice I could imagine. This could not be happening. It had to stop. It had



to! But it didn't. On and on it went. Blood and bruises and jeers. And then I caught a glimpse of His face again. The same goodness and tenderness I had seen before were still there. But I almost hated to see it this time. It just made the whole scene seem worse. The forgiveness, the love. It was all so unfair. He was so . . . so good.

It only got worse. A cross. Nails through His hands. Nails through His feet. Agony. People laughing. Laughing? I stared in disbelief. This must stop. Please, someone stop this. I cried out to God to bring deliverance, to bring justice. But then—horror of horrors—I could not, could *not* believe what happened next. God, the Father, held a rod as well. It was much bigger than the others, and much worse. It was a rod that symbolized the stroke of justice—the wrath of God for the sins of the world. No! Please, no! This is Your beloved One. This is Your Son! The One in whom is all Your delight. Please, don't! . . . But then—there was darkness.

Horrified, I imagined the “rod of justice” coming down on the only One who did not deserve it. I imagined the Son being broken and crushed—yet with love and forgiveness and tenderness still flowing from Him. How could it be that God would forsake Him? How could He be pleased to crush Him?

The darkness covered all the land, and I could no longer see His face. But I heard His anguished cry: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” And in those dark moments I realized that the suffering I could *not* see was far worse than what I *could*.

Stunned and traumatized, I stepped back. I forced myself to breathe. I tried not to comprehend what I had just seen: One so deserving of glory and praise, yet receiving such punishment. I'm not sure how long it was before I realized that I was holding something: I also had a whip in my hand. It was then I understood that my hand also was on the rod that fell on Him. Was I responsible? For this? I realized that I had not been merely a spectator.

At last it was over. It was finished. It—is—finished, for all eternity! It is done! God the Father has seen the anguish of His soul and has been satisfied. Never would I have dreamed that justice would have been this costly. How vast is the extent of my sin—that this was the price. And how immeasurable the extent of His love—that this much He would pay.

—Sarah Mally

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to His own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all ... it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin ... He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:5-6, 10-11).

## **WHY WE SERVE HIM**

“For the love of Christ constraineth us ... that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

We are not dedicated to a system or to a list of rules—we are dedicated to a Man, Jesus Christ. He wants us to serve Him out of love—because we want to! The only reasonable response to His inconceivable love is to yield our lives, service, and affections unreservedly to Him. Not only did He save our lives, He did it by sacrificing His own.

## **THE QUESTION**

Now think about this: out of all the ages of history, God chose for YOU to be living in the twenty-first century because He has special assignments for you—right here, right now. If you obey, He will enable you to do what He has called you to do. The work may be hard, but it is exciting and fulfilling. The Lord is offering us the privilege of working alongside Him! The question is, will we join Him? Remember, the cost is extremely high. This is what Jesus requires: Give all.

“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33).

## **RUNNING WITH THE BATON**

Let’s do a quick review of where we are in history right now. Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He ascended to Heaven, and He left His disciples with the commission to take the gospel around the world. The early church began with a small group. There were only about 120 believers gathered in the upper room after Christ’s ascension (Acts 1:15). Odds were against them. They weren’t professionals. Scripture calls them “unschooled” and “ordinary.” But they knew Jesus. And within 50 years, Christianity had spread throughout the whole Mediterranean world. It was said that “they turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).



In the generations that followed, persecution was extremely intense. Countless followers of Jesus laid down their lives for the sake of the gospel. Their blood was “seed,” an early church father stated.<sup>2</sup> The more they were persecuted, the more the church grew.

This was only the beginning. In more recent centuries, men sacrificed their lives so that the Bible could be translated into our language. Men refused to compromise the truth and led a reformation, bringing people back to the basic truths of the Scriptures. The founding fathers of our nation risked their lives so future generations in America could have the opportunity to obey God freely.

In the last several hundred years, God has continued to work in this world through faithful men and women, and His work has not slowed down. Revivals. Awakenings. Missionaries sent all around the world. The explosion of missions that started in the 1800s has had such a great impact that there are now more Christians in non-Western nations than in Western ones.

Twenty-five hundred languages now have translations of the Bible, or portions of it.<sup>3</sup> God’s work has neither declined nor decreased. Countless faithful people have gone before us, laying down their lives to spread the message of the gospel. We are the beneficiaries of their sacrifices. And now the

baton has been handed to us. The responsibility rests upon our generation.

As God used the original disciples who were imperfect, ordinary, and lacking worldly credentials, He has continued for 2,000 years to do the same. He uses common people—who love Him—to accomplish His work. (See 1 Corinthians 1).

Today Jesus is at the right hand of God, building His church. In a short while, He is coming back as Judge and King. Very soon, we will see Him face to face. That will be a *very* exciting day! It could be that we are the last generation before Jesus' return. It could be that this is the home stretch for the church—the last lap. The baton—the gospel—has now been handed to us, and there is still much work to be done! In every nation, people are dying without Christ. An estimated 150,000 people die every day (that's approximately two people per second), and those who do not know Christ will be separated from God eternally, paying the penalty for their sins in Hell.

This brings us back to the question each one of us must ask ourselves: What has God given *me* to do?

We have been entrusted with the most valuable news in the world—the saving message of the cross. Let us follow in the steps of those who have gone before. Heaven is watching. The world is waiting.