

WILL OUR GENERATION SPEAK?

A CALL TO BE BOLD WITH THE GOSPEL

| **GRACE MALLY**

ILLUSTRATED BY HAROLD MALLY

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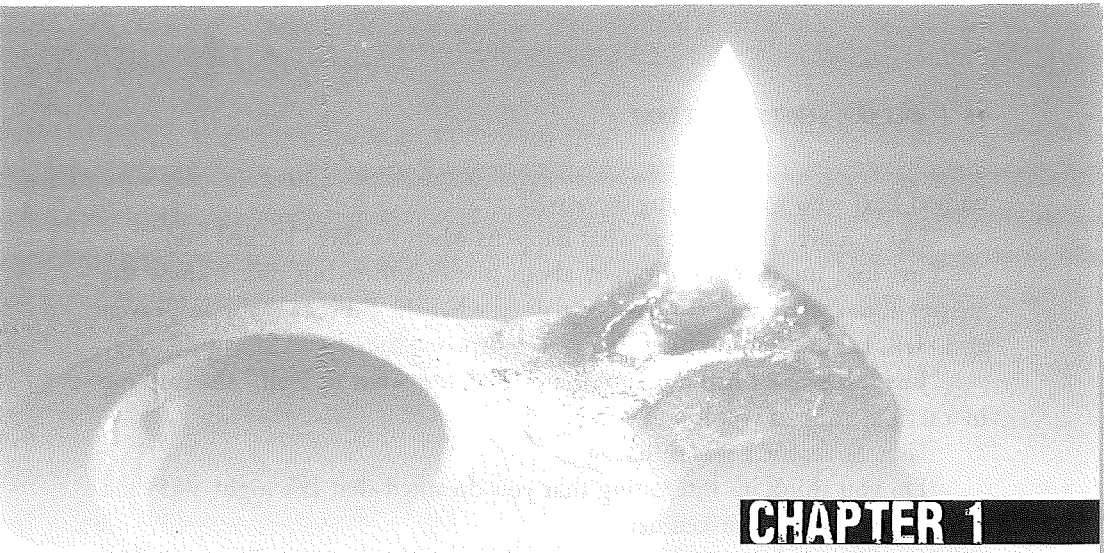
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CHAPTER 1

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.¹ 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 discipled. 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,

