

International and *New York Times* Best-Selling Author

NICK VUJICIC

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ONLY

BE THE
HANDS
AND FEET

Living Out God's Love
for All His Children

International and *New York Times* best-selling author

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BE THE HANDS AND FEET

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*I would like to dedicate this book in loving memory
of my dad, Boris Vujicic, who went home on May 14, 2017.*

I have fought the good fight, I have
finished the race, I have kept the faith.

—2 TIMOTHY 4:7

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If God can use a man without arms and
legs to be His hands and feet, then He
will certainly use any willing heart!

—NICK VUJICIC

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INTRODUCTION

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.

—SAINT TERESA OF AVILA, “CHRIST HAS NO BODY”

Your first thought upon picking up this book is probably, *How can a person born without any limbs consider himself to be the hands and feet of Jesus on earth?*

I agree, hands down, that this is a very good question. I asked myself the same thing many times as I was growing up. What purpose could God have for a man with no limbs?

The above quotation from Saint Teresa of Avila had a huge impact on me, as you might imagine. Her words provided one of the many steps I took to finding my purpose as an inspirational speaker and Christian role model who shares his faith with others. I can't do everything, but I do whatever I can to compel people to fill God's house. This is what we are meant to do as Christians, all of us.

The truth of who we are is how we live day to day. If you want to influence others, the most important thing you can do is be a living example of

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the principles, ideals, and faith that you advocate. This is especially true for Christians. The best way to share your beliefs with others is to live according to your faith when you are under pressure, when challenges arise, and even when life seems to be piling one hardship upon another on you.

Those around you watch and take note of how you respond to life's toughest times. They observe how you love and treat others. They judge your authenticity by how you handle yourself and whether you live up to your claims when the dark days descend.

Part of wisdom is knowing when to react strongly and when to let things pass. It's not about putting up a brave front or a steely smile or being positive just for appearance's sake. It's about drawing strength from deep within and, rather than wallowing in despair, taking one step at a time in positive directions.

I've written and spoken often of the challenges I've faced in life because I was shorted the standard allotment of limbs at birth. In describing my journey, I've noted my early crisis of faith, my despair and depression that led to an attempted suicide, and how I eventually came to understand that I was not God's mistake but instead that God did have a plan and a purpose for His "perfectly imperfect child."

My life story has been well chronicled in my earlier books, in my father's book about raising me, and in my many speeches and videos. This book covers some recent major events—and a few scares—in my life, but it is more about my *life's work*, how I found my calling as the hands and feet of Jesus on earth, how a few recent challenges have affirmed and strengthened that calling, and how I think you and I can expand our influence and bring more of God's children to Him by living our faith and inspiring, loving, and serving others.

I thought about calling this book *Adventures in Evangelism*, but unfortunately, the term *evangelism* has been tarnished with negative connotations over the years in some areas of the world. I get it.

Too many people have been put off by overzealous Christians who

probably had good intentions but reached out with poorly conceived strategies. They may have come across as pushy or more concerned about their agendas than the feelings and beliefs of those they approached.

I believe all Christians have a responsibility to share their faith and bring others to Christ. His followers are, after all, “fishers” of men and women. We can’t just be passengers in the boat. We need to cast our lines, because there is an ocean of people out there who need the redemptive power of God’s love. My hope is that this book will inspire you to find your own way to do that in a manner that best suits you and best serves our heavenly Father.

There are many praying for *revival*, another word actually that has been overused, particularly in the US and other western parts of the globe. What does that revival even look like? I personally just want to fulfill the mandate to preach the gospel and see people come to Jesus, start an active relationship with Him, be transformed by that daily, and become true followers of Him.

Many await a movement, when actually the basic thing God has asked of us—to tell others that He lives—doesn’t always happen. We say, “God move.” God says, “I will move through you when you move.”

PART I

LETTING
YOUR LIGHT
SHINE

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1

CALLED TO SERVE

I certainly didn't start out thinking I would be God's hands and feet, an evangelist proclaiming the good news. In fact, even though I grew up in a strong Christian family with a father who was a lay pastor, I confess I was among those teenagers who shunned "the God squad" in school for a time. I wanted to be cool, and talking about your faith to other teens wasn't considered cool at all.

I had to get comfortable with myself and my beliefs before I could ever be comfortable and effective in sharing my faith with other people. Even after I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I wasn't inclined to go forth and save the rest of the world at first. I wanted to be a professional soccer player, but I am built so low to the ground, league officials ruled no one would be able to stop me. So I had to pursue a different career, just to keep it fair for the other blokes.

Once playing for Manchester United was ruled out, I wasn't sure what to do with myself. My dad, the lay pastor, thought I'd be much better off as an accountant, and for lack of other options, I went along with that.

I never considered that my faith would become a career because it was such a personal and intimate aspect of my life. Our family church was the Apostolic Christian Church of the Nazarene in Keilor Downs in the state of Victoria. My memories of going there are mostly focused on being with my parents and my brother and sister and all my aunts, uncles, and cousins. Worship was a very social experience for me.

My father sang tenor and my uncle Ivan sang bass in the church choir. As founding pastors of the congregation, they'd sit in the front row with the other choir members. I joined them as the unofficial percussionist. I kept the beat by tapping my little foot on a hymnal book, which substituted for a drum. Later they bought me a drum machine and eventually a keyboard I could play with my foot. I loved music and it was one of my favorite parts of church. I associated God with everything I loved.

My father always talked about God on a very personal level, and I picked up on that. I conversed with God all the time, it seemed. He was very real to me, like a member of the family or a good friend. I felt like He knew everything about me and I could talk to Him about everything. He was real to me and always there for me. God wasn't a father figure or a vengeful power; He was more like an older, wiser mentor and friend.

I prayed every night, but I didn't think of myself as religious. I didn't dream of being a pastor. Our family just lived in faith. To me, being Christian was like being Serbian or Australian. I didn't think there was anything special about it, and I certainly didn't feel I was holier than anyone else.

I felt guilty for years because I had unholy thoughts when our family friends, Victor and Elsie Schlatter, gave a slideshow presentation on their missionary work in the wilds of New Guinea. They had translated the Bible into pidgin English for the natives there, and they recruited hundreds of them to Christianity. It was hard to believe that there were people who had never heard about Jesus Christ. I assumed He was known about by all.

I confess, though, that what left the biggest impression on me from their slideshow were the photos of naked New Guinea women. That probably wasn't what they'd hoped I'd remember about their presentation, but, hey, I was just a boy being a boy. I was easily distracted. Especially by Miss Isabell, our Sunday school teacher. She had short blonde hair, big blue eyes, and an engaging smile. I thought she was really pretty. I had a crush on her!

I was no saint, believe me. I got in trouble more than a few times for chewing gum in church, and one Sunday I choked on a piece of candy just before the service started. Since we were seated in front, the entire congregation saw my dad grab me, turn me upside down, and slap me on the back to dislodge the candy.

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

That would not be the last time I was saved in church. Other kids could release their nervous energy during services by tapping their feet on the kneelers or drumming their fingers on the pews. When I was antsy, I'd go to the very last pew in the back of the church and rub the back of my head on the brick wall. Crazy, I know! Thanks to that bad habit, for a while I was the youngest person in our church to have a bald spot.

I was a little goofy as well as easily confused. I was totally baffled when a South American immigrant named Jesus showed up in our first-grade elementary school class.

"Why do they call you Jesus?" I asked, wondering if we were at the end of times when Jesus was to return as the Messiah.

I was very suspicious because our Sunday school class had taught us that when the devil showed up, he'd claim to be Christ. I was on the lookout for imposters. Poor Jesus, my classmate, didn't understand why I kept interrogating him about his name.

I took my Sunday school teachings seriously. When I was six or seven, after we learned about the second coming of Jesus Christ, I had a dream about the rapture. In my dream, I was visiting my grandparents' house just around the corner from the church, and I saw all these angels come down and take people up. I saw one of my family members go up, and I waited, but no angel came for me. I desperately, and sadly, thought, *Where is my angel?* Then I woke up, which was a relief!

I didn't want to be left behind, so I doubled down on trying to be a good Christian boy. Every Sunday in church, the pastor would ask if we had Jesus in our hearts, and I always answered yes as loudly as I could in case the angels were listening. We were taught that to be Christians we needed God in our lives every day. I wasn't afraid to tell people that I went to church, but we weren't taught to talk about Jesus with our friends who weren't Christians. We were supposed to keep it to ourselves and love everyone. I don't remember ever praying openly for friends to accept Him into their lives. Instead, I did it privately so they never knew what hit them!

The only evangelists we talked about were heroic missionaries like the Schlatters, our family friends. Victor and Elsie became mentors to me later in life. They were the first true global soldiers of Christ I ever knew. Victor was like a Bible character, a big man with long gray hair and a gray beard bigger than my head. They made missionary work sound so exciting. They told us cool stories about life in the rain forest and being chased by people who didn't like Christians.

I was in awe of them. They were so exotic, like Indiana Jones meets Billy Graham. In their younger days, my parents had considered working in New Guinea as missionaries with Victor and Elsie. On their honeymoon, they even visited the Schlatters to check it out, but my dad said it was too wild for him. I often imagined what my life would have been like if they'd decided to stay in New Guinea. I am thankful my family stayed in Melbourne.

A GREATER VISION

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Truthfully, I didn't think I would ever be a missionary, because the Schlatters were special people who managed to live and thrive under extremely tough conditions. Still, they inspired me to do whatever I could to help the poor around the world.

They projected their slideshows on the wall at our church, and you'd see all these naked children eating what looked like roots and bugs. We prayed for them and raided our piggy banks to help feed and clothe them. I really admired Victor and Elsie for dedicating their lives to serve as God's ambassadors.

I was in my early teens when I heard a very dramatic story of a missionary whose plane crashed in a remote area of Papua New Guinea. He was taken prisoner but escaped. I saw an interview in which he said it would have been impossible for him to get out of there, but God made all his captors deaf so he could free himself, take possession of their plane, and get away. The film is called *Ee-Taow*.

Then I read *The Heavenly Man* by the Chinese evangelist Brother Yun, a leader of the underground Christian church movement there. I could relate to Brother Yun's stories of being imprisoned and tortured by government authorities in China; my parents and grandparents had fled Serbia because of the persecution of Christians there.

Yun's book said that God always stepped in to protect him at the worst times. During his stay in prison, Brother Yun escaped death on many occasions. He was supposed to be hanged, but whenever his time came, the executioner claimed to be too tired or somehow paralyzed. The executioner eventually told Yun that he would make sure he was not killed inside the prison.

Brother Yun also writes of escaping from a maximum-security prison by listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit when it told him to just walk out the prison gate one day. He followed those instructions and walked out without being challenged by the guards; it was as if he were invisible. Though many have argued that his story does not sound plausible, the Chinese government said his escape was “an embarrassing mishap.”

I was in my teens when I read Brother Yun’s book and the books of another brave Christian role model, former New York City gang leader Nicky Cruz. His *Run Baby Run* is a classic story of a troubled street kid who turned his life around through Christ and became a missionary to other young people.

The inspiring 1970 movie about his life, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, has been viewed by more than fifty million people in 150 countries. Like Brother Yun, Nicky Cruz endured many hardships, but God seemed to step in whenever his life was threatened. He writes of having a gun pointed at his head, but when his would-be killer pulled the trigger, the gun misfired, saving his life.

Books like *The Heavenly Man* and *Run Baby Run*, along with the stories told by the Schlatters, later gave me the courage to leave the security of my family and home at the age of nineteen and make my first trip as a Christian speaker to South Africa. They taught me there is no safer place to be than where God leads you.

When we are young, most of us can’t see or even comprehend what God has planned for our lives. Yet looking back now, as I enter my midthirties after already traveling millions of miles and speaking to millions of people, I can see the influences and experiences that led me to His path.

I have to laugh, especially when I think how puzzled I was as a boy when my Uncle Sam patted my head and said, “One day, Nicky, you will be shaking hands with presidents.”

I certainly could not see that happening at the time. God must have been whispering into my uncle’s ear, because I’ve met more than a dozen

presidents and heads of state over the years. Now I've yet to shake hands with any of them, for obvious reasons, but I've hugged most of them!

ENCOURAGERS AND GUIDES

As I've written before, my other influences as a teenager included my high school's janitor, Mr. Arnold. For some reason, everyone called him Mr. Arnold even though Arnold was his first name. I never knew his last name, but he was always there for me and the other students. He encouraged me to talk openly about my struggles with my disabilities and my faith, first with the students in the Christian teen group he led and then with other students and groups around the area.

I didn't think of myself as an evangelist even remotely at that point. I was more interested in breaking down barriers between people and simply sharing how I did not think hope existed until I allowed God to help. Over time, I saw that my stories inspired others, especially when I explained how I finally came to understand I wasn't one of God's rare mistakes and that we are all beautiful and perfect creations in His eyes.

When I heard my first professional motivational speaker, Reggie Dabs, who gave a talk at my high school, he quieted nearly fourteen hundred restless students and left them inspired simply by telling his life story, which was a message of hope: "You can't change your past, but you can change your future."

Reggie showed me there could be a path to a career in public speaking. Because of the times in my life when I felt different due to my lack of limbs, I always made it a point in my speeches to tell everyone they were beautiful and loved by God. I thought it was something people should hear. We are all beautiful as God's creations.

Even when I began to see myself growing into a career as a professional speaker, my focus was more in the inspirational and motivational realm. I knew many people did not want to hear a faith-based message, but as they

heard me talk about life, love, hope, and faith in general terms, they felt free to ask questions about faith. Even then, I still didn't see myself as a role model for other Christians or aspiring Christians.

My dad didn't either. He kept encouraging me to get degrees in accounting and business. I took his advice, figuring it wouldn't hurt to have a backup plan if speaking didn't work out.

FINDING A PATH

Again, God stepped in very quietly and gave me a little nudge back in the direction of His chosen path for me. I was asked to be a volunteer religious education teacher at my old high school in my spare time. They had recent grads come in to give four lessons a week, talking about God and the Bible.

I found myself in front of teen audiences at my old school, sharing my faith and encouraging others in their beliefs. I didn't think of this volunteer job as recruiting believers to Christ, but in retrospect, it was good training for that. I have never written about this because it's a bit of a touchy subject, since around this time there was a little backlash within my own church because I'd been invited to speak at other churches in the area.

At the time, my family church was very insular. They didn't like members of the congregation visiting other churches, probably because they feared losing them. Even my parents and some relatives told me I shouldn't speak at any other churches.

I understood where they were coming from, but I thought all Christians should embrace each other, put aside their doctrinal differences, and focus on our shared love of God. My mission was to share my testimony to encourage all to trust in God. A friend, Jamie Pentsa, encouraged me to accept invitations from all over the area, and he volunteered to drive me to them in his Volvo.

I spoke mostly to other youth groups at first, offering lessons from

Scripture that had impacted me. Those presentations became so popular I put together a monthly newsletter that I delivered to people on an e-mail list. I also developed my own website so people could access my writings and contact me if they wanted me to speak somewhere.

Soon I was receiving more than seventy invitations a week to speak to Bible clubs, youth groups, and church congregations throughout the region. That response inspired me to record my testimony in churches with a video crew. I sent those first *Life Without Limbs* DVDs out to anyone who requested them on my website.

One or more of those videos reached South Africa, where a man named John Pingo saw it. He contacted me and offered to set up a speaking tour around that country. That trip, which my parents had many reservations about, marked the beginning of my international outreach, which to this day has taken me to more than sixty countries around the world. As opportunities came, God also moved other friends, cousins, uncles, and even my brother to take me places, serve as caregivers, and help me encourage more people—and even see some saved.

A GOD-GIVEN EVOLUTION

My career as a Christian role model and inspirational speaker was an unexpected blessing, and looking back, surely part of God's plan for me. My passion for it grew with each engagement. Coming from a childhood when, at times, I felt there was no hope for my future, I was exhilarated by the enthusiastic responses to my speeches and videos. For a man who once had no hope, there can be nothing more rewarding than giving hope to others. The fact that as a young guy I could share my feelings about the gospel of Jesus with large groups of people of all ages gave me a sense of purpose. I felt I could make a contribution, which was so important to me. And I felt closer to God, because so many came forward at altar calls and gave their lives to Christ.

I also witnessed the power of the gospel. To me, 80 percent of inspiration is telling stories. So much of what is in the Bible is encouragement found in stories and testimonies, stories that inspire faith, stories of God's faithfulness. As you read the Word, it produces faith.

I've rarely shared this, but when I was about twelve years old, I was coming out of a dark period of depression. I had this strong compulsion to learn as much about God as I could, so I started typing out the entire Bible on my computer, using my little foot to peck away.

I started with Genesis 1, the beginning. I was about halfway through Genesis when my mum came into my room, heard me pounding away at the keyboard, and asked what I was doing.

"I'm writing out the Bible," I said.

"Nicky," she said, "it's already written."

She had a point. I could only type about eighteen words a minute back then. I eventually realized I'd taken on a much bigger task than I could complete. My compulsion ended, but my love for God's Word has never diminished. Every time I read the Bible, I learn something new, something deeper and more meaningful. My reverence for God and my personal love for Jesus grow with each fresh viewing.

SHARING FAITH

A big part of being a Christian is sharing what God means to you in a way that is relevant to others. That is how faith comes alive. When I began sharing my testimony to more and more people, the general thinking among Protestants, in my young eyes, was that to bring more people into their churches, all they had to do was tell strangers they loved them and be generous.

This was supposed to convince others that Christ followers were good and kind. The idea was to plant seeds of faith in them through example so

they would be drawn to Christians and want to know more. The problem with that is there are other good and kind people in the world, including many Hindus and Muslims.

Followers of Jesus need to be more than good and kind. We need to have powerful messages to share. When I told my dad that I was writing this book he said, “People think it’s complicated, but it’s not complicated to evangelize at all. We should be ready to share our faith at any time, and it comes down to sitting someone down face to face and just being real. Tell them *what* Jesus means to you. Tell them *how* your life changed after meeting Jesus. Being a believer will show also with how one lives.”

The Bible says, “You will recognize them by their fruits.” Inspiring others to become good Christians requires reaching out and motivating people to think about the importance of God in their lives, but you have to be prayerfully wise about your communication. You have to adjust your approach to each individual because we all have different personalities and experiences. First Peter 3:15 says, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (NIV).

“WALKING AROUND” CHRISTIANITY

My natural progression into serving as the arms and legs of Jesus included some early “walking around” Christianity—with a dog. Starting when I was seventeen years old, I would go out in my wheelchair to take our dog for a walk and strike up conversations with almost everyone I met.

I don’t know whether it was the cuteness of our dog, Seth (a Jack Russell terrier and Cavalier King Charles spaniel mix), or just me, but there always seemed to be plenty of folks who’d talk or converse while walking alongside us.

We'd talk about the dog, and if we'd never met, they'd often get around to asking how I'd lost my limbs. When I shared my story, they'd be intrigued or touched. These conversations sometimes led to discussions of faith. They wondered sometimes how I could have such a positive attitude, and I'd tell them I believed God created me for a purpose and I'd put my faith in that.

I would offer to pray with those who seemed interested. I don't know whether they were moved by my faith or something else, but it wasn't unusual for people to shed a tear or two when I talked to them about the importance of God in my life and being thankful for the blessings He gives.

Walking around, sharing my dog, Seth, and my faith, became a real passion for me. I'd leave the house with Seth and couldn't wait to see who would come around the corner. After a while, I'd offer to share my story and my beliefs just about anywhere I went. I don't remember being rejected by anyone, though there were probably some who took a detour when they saw me coming.

I tried not to be hard core or high pressure. I would just ask how they were doing, and after a few minutes of conversation, I might say, "Is there anything you'd like me to pray for on your behalf?" Most people appreciated the offer. Who doesn't need a prayer now and then either for themselves or someone they care about? It's like being offered a surprise gift by a stranger, and it's even better than winning the lottery because the prize of prayer is everlasting!

ALTAR CALL

My first big speaking event was at the Logan Uniting Church in Springwood, Queensland. Youth pastor Jim Haak, who was a high school chaplain in the area, heard me speak at an event and then invited me to attend their Year 10 Conference, along with about three hundred high school

sophomores. He didn't ask me to be a speaker, just to attend, so I brought along some friends and cousins.

The tenth year of school in Australia is when many teens decide whether to continue their schooling or look for a job. This conference was designed to help them develop some life skills that would be useful either in college or in the working world. Faith was a big part of it, but there were outdoor activities, forums, workshops, and inspirational and motivational events.

Be the Hands and Feet

The Day Nick Became an Evangelist . . . and Joined a Motorcycle Gang

By Jim Haak

That morning I heard a lot of commotion and a ruckus somewhere. The crowd included a whole bunch of boys and some were from rough backgrounds. I thought it was a fight. I went to break it up, but when I walked through the crowd, I realized they were all gathered around Nick!

They were captivated by this young guy with no arms and legs who was playing his unique version of handball with some other kids. He was bouncing the ball off his head and kicking it in the air with his little foot. He was very skillful and everyone wanted to have a look.

Of course, he was also speaking quite loudly and using all the Australian colloquial language. He was solid in his faith but not pious or overly religious. He knew how to draw in a crowd even then.

Nick turned out to be an attraction just by himself that day. Kids gathered around him everywhere he went. The counselors all marveled at the way girls and boys alike were drawn to him, telling him their fears and troubles, bowing their heads as he prayed for them. He was so open and vulnerable that they felt safe confiding in him. They knew just by looking at him that Nick had overcome suffering and bullying too. They trusted him and believed him when he told them, "I love you."

The final event that day was the keynote message and a forum on the main stage. It had been a long, hot day. This God Squad fellow was supposed to give a presentation, but he couldn't get his PowerPoint program to work. The natives were getting restless. He looked at me and said, "I'm having trouble here. Can you entertain the crowd for a while?"

I was sitting on stage with a panel of experienced youth workers, so I turned to them and said, "Does anybody have a joke they can tell?"

Just then Nick came forward and said, "I'll talk to them!"

"What are you going to say, Nick?" I asked.

"Don't worry. I'll just talk to them," he said.

I was still thinking the God Squad guy would get his act together, but I gave Nick the okay to talk just a bit. First, though, we had to figure out how to get a microphone on him since he couldn't hold it. We fussed around and finally Nick said, "Don't worry. I've got this."

The natives were even more restless at that point, and we needed to fill the dead time for our final speaker. I was a little worried about putting poor Nick out there in front of them all. I shouldn't have worried.

After a few words, the entire audience was silent. Nick captivated them all just by talking about the challenges he'd faced being without limbs and so different from everyone else. He talked about his faith as a source of strength, and he told them that God's love could sustain them all, but he didn't push his beliefs on them.

In many ways, it was a standard motivational speech, yet Nick tells his stories with so much passion, humor, and power that the message seems fresh and more engaging. When he encourages people, telling them they can do anything they want to do if they believe in themselves, Nick brings a deeper meaning to the message. Young people who were struggling knew he understood them. Kids who felt like outcasts knew he had faced shunning and bullying too. The toughest kids admired his courage and candor. Everyone wanted to be Nick's friend, and he encouraged them all to treat each other with respect.

We learned that Nick isn't about simply entertaining people. He deals with really hard issues, very real things, not only faith, but about the challenges of life. He talks about realizing that while his disability is a burden, it could also be a gift, which is a message from the gospel itself: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Nick is humble, but he has the kingdom and he is happy to share it. God uses the ordinary and the simple, the broken and the wounded. He uses them to transform and redeem.

Honestly, we were all awestruck that day. Even the God Squad biker fellow who was supposed to be the main speaker surrendered. His PowerPoint presentation was ready, but he didn't want to follow Nick on that stage.

“Don’t worry. He got it just fine,” he whispered to me as Nick was wrapping up.

Even though Nick had done a tremendous job just stepping in, I was more than a little skeptical when he extended an invitation at the end of his speech, saying that if anyone needed a bit of love, they could come up and give him a hug.

The other forum leaders and I quietly scoffed, thinking there is no way any of these teenagers would want to be caught dead hugging someone in public. They may be more open to that in the United States, but Australia has a much more reserved and hardnosed culture. Aussies don’t show their softer emotions—or so we thought.

Nick made fools of us for doubting his power to reach an audience. Kids came pouring out of their chairs and quietly formed a long line in front of Nick, which was a miracle in itself. Many of them had tears in their eyes after embracing him. Our entire panel of veteran youth workers watched with our jaws dropped. We had never seen anything like this!

After the last hugger had moved on, I went down to talk to Nick. He was so gifted, I figured I’d book him for the next year’s forum. Just as I was walking down, Nick headed toward the parking lot in his wheelchair, surrounded by his new fans.

Before I could catch up to him outside, one of the God Squad motorcycle club members came roaring up on his Harley-Davidson. Another biker lifted Nick onto the back of the motorcycle, and they zoomed off with Nick screaming, “Woo-hoo!”

And that was our introduction to the soon-to-be famous Nick Vujcic!

It was a crazy, fun event. There was even a booth manned by members of a Christian motorcycle gang called The God Squad. They were some scary looking, leather-wearing soldiers of Christ with really loud bikes who considered themselves counterculture faithful.

When you get that many Aussie teenagers in one place, things tend to get rowdy, so when Pastor Haak noticed a big crowd gathered in one area and heard some people shouting, he thought a fight had broken out. In fact, I had become something of a curiosity, but Jim tells the story better than I do in the sidebar on the previous pages.

FINDING AN AUDIENCE

I have to say that day at the Year 10 Conference had a huge impact on me as well. Everything just fell into place so naturally, and the teens and the motorcycle guys and the counselors were all so receptive and welcoming. I was just overwhelmed. The capper during my talk was when I saw a girl crying as she raised her hand to get my attention.

She asked if she could come up and give me a hug. I said, “Sure, please do.” When she got to me, she gave me this huge, wraparound hug and whispered in my ear, “No one has ever told me that they loved me. No one has ever told me that I am beautiful the way I am.”

Whoa! That was when I knew I was born to be a speaker who communicates messages of hope. Later that year, Jim asked me to speak at his church youth group. Many people wept as I shared the truth of how Jesus changed my life. I invited the crowd to silently say a prayer to Jesus right there and then.

After the presentation, I hugged and talked with many people. One girl came up and said, “I’ve just given my life to Jesus tonight, and I know I will never be the same again.” My world stopped right there—it seemed to go from black and white to color.

This was the first time someone shared directly with me that I’d helped

them accept Jesus as their Savior, and I was blown away. Having that effect on someone was intoxicating for me. It was like the smell of apple blossoms, and I wanted more and more of it. I knew it was not me or my words. God was working through me.

Another blessing from that day was that Jim Haak became a mentor to me. At the time, I still had some doubts that I could make a living as a public speaker, let alone as a Christian role model. I told him my goal was to be a successful businessman and make a lot of money so I could support myself, because I didn't want to be a burden on my family for the rest of my life.

Jim quietly said he thought I could be an even better professional speaker. He was very kind to me. I think he was the first to tell me that the obstacles in my life could serve as stepping-stones rather than barricades.

Jim and the other youth counselors at that event began inviting me to speak at every event in the area. They were among those who coached me with speaking tips and helped me to refine my message.

My vision for my life was still a little hazy at that point, but it was coming into focus quickly. It was at an event during this time, probably one put on by Jim Haak, that I was introduced to a youth group as evangelist Nick Vujicic for the first time. I hadn't requested that introduction, and at first it threw me off.

Evangelist? Me?

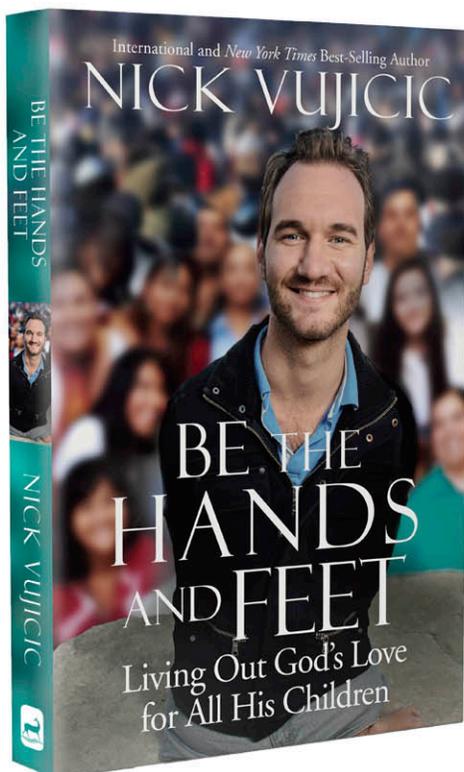
And then I felt this passion well up in my heart to let the world know that Jesus wants to live in us all.

My next thought was quite simply, *Why not give it a shot?*

God opened the door, and His child with no arms and no legs walked through it.

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