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BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *JESUS IN ME*

and

RACHEL-RUTH LOTZ WRIGHT

Jesus Followers

Real-Life

Lessons for

Igniting Faith

in the Next

Generation

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BOOKS BY ANNE GRAHAM LOTZ

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Real-Life Lessons
for Igniting Faith
in the Next Generation

Anne
Graham
Lotz
and
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JESUS FOLLOWERS

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Dedicated
to
Bell, Sophia, and Riggin
and
to the parents and grandparents of the next generation

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant
between me and you and your descendants after you
for the generations to come,
to be your God
and
the God of your descendants after you.

Genesis 17:7

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INTRODUCTION

The Race of Life

Almost every weekend during the spring months, my husband, Danny, would take our three young children to watch the track-and-field events at the University of North Carolina, which was his alma mater.

One of their favorite events was the four-by-one-hundred-meter relay race, in which four runners compete as a team. The race is still one of our favorite Olympic track events! As it begins, the first runner from each team crouches at the starting block, gripping the baton. When the signal is given, the runner explodes out of the starting block and runs the first hundred meters as swiftly as he can. As he completes his lap around the track, he approaches the second runner on his team. The second runner is already in full stride when the first runner reaches out and passes the baton to his teammate, who continues running at full speed in front of him. The second runner then runs his hundred-meter lap and passes the baton to the number three runner, who takes it in full stride, and so on until the fourth runner crosses the finish line, clutching the all-important baton.

Winning a relay race depends not only on the speed of the runners but also on each team member's ability to transfer the baton. If the

baton is dropped or even bobbled, precious seconds are wasted, and the race may be lost. If the runner fails to pass the baton, the team is disqualified from the race altogether.

You and I are in a race called life. The Baton is Truth that leads to faith in Jesus Christ. Each generation receives the Baton from the previous generation, runs the race to the best of its ability, then is responsible for passing it smoothly and securely to the next generation.

Passing the Baton of Truth traces all the way back to the first generation of humanity. Following Adam and Eve's disobedience, when sin entered the human race, each person faced the decision of whether to seek a right relationship with God or pursue his or her own selfish desires. In Genesis 5, we find a genealogy that lists ten generations and reveals the passing of the Baton from one to the next. Each man listed lived in the midst of a civilization dominated by Cain's attitude of defiance toward God. The civilization was so wicked that it provoked God's judgment, resulting in the Flood.

Amid the wickedness of Cain's civilization, these ten men stood out like giants surrounded by spiritual dwarfs. Like a ten-man relay team, each received the Baton of Truth from the one who had preceded him. It is interesting to note that each generation was represented by a named individual, not a couple. Could it be that some of these individuals were single parents? While we can't know for certain, we do know that each received the Baton, then grasped it for himself, running his own race with diligence and perseverance. Regardless of whether or not they had believing spouses . . . regardless of their wicked surroundings . . . these individuals successfully passed Truth to the next generation.

Like Cain's civilization, ours is experiencing a bankruptcy of moral and spiritual values that threatens to erode our very existence. The flashing-red-light warning for you and me is to beware of . . .

getting caught up in the way everyone around us is acting . . .

indulging in self-pity or self-focus as struggling parents, single or otherwise . . .

living for our own selfish desires and happiness . . .

conforming to the pressure of the opinions of others . . .
succumbing to the fear of our cancel-culture . . .
and thus neglect to pass Truth to our children.

As parents, grandparents, and mentors, we must strive to be giants among spiritual dwarfs by receiving, running with, and relaying to the next generation the Baton of Truth that leads to personal faith in Jesus Christ.

In order to be successful, it's imperative that we be genuine Jesus Followers ourselves. And that's why I felt compelled to write this book with my daughter Rachel-Ruth.

Drawing on the Genesis 5 genealogy as a framework, the pages that follow are divided into four parts to reflect the four-by-one-hundred-meter relay race and expand on the biblical description of the very first transfers of the Baton. These transfers seem to emphasize the unique impact of our witness, our worship, our walk, and our work, all of which lead to a smooth, successful passing of the Baton. Rachel-Ruth illustrates each segment in the race of life by sharing stories from our family, offering vivid descriptions of how the Baton was passed to us, inspiring us to live in such a way that we can effectively pass it to those who follow.

Our hope is to encourage you to be intentional as you, too, seek to be a Jesus Follower who successfully passes the Baton to the next generation.



Genesis 5

The Beginning of the Race

¹This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. ²He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. ³And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. ⁴After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years; and he had sons and daughters. ⁵So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.

⁶Seth lived one hundred and five years, and begot Enosh. ⁷After he begot Enosh, Seth lived eight hundred and seven years, and had sons and daughters. ⁸So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died.

⁹Enosh lived ninety years, and begot Cainan. ¹⁰After he begot Cainan, Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years, and had sons and daughters. ¹¹So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died.

¹²Cainan lived seventy years, and begot Mahalalel. ¹³After he begot Mahalalel, Cainan lived eight hundred and forty years, and had

sons and daughters.¹⁴ So all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.

¹⁵ Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and begot Jared.¹⁶ After he begot Jared, Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years, and had sons and daughters.¹⁷ So all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years; and he died.

¹⁸ Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and begot Enoch.¹⁹ After he begot Enoch, Jared lived eight hundred years, and had sons and daughters.²⁰ So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years; and he died.

²¹ Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah.²² After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters.²³ So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years.²⁴ And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

²⁵ Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and begot Lamech.²⁶ After he begot Lamech, Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years, and had sons and daughters.²⁷ So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died.

²⁸ Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son.²⁹ And he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed."³⁰ After he begot Noah, Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years, and had sons and daughters.³¹ So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years; and he died.

³² And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.¹

PART ONE

Our Witness

By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

Hebrews 11:4

The Bible states in Genesis 1 that in the beginning God created everything. Everything! Day by day by day, He brought everything into existence where nothing had existed previously. On the sixth day of Creation, God created people in His own image with the capacity to have a personal relationship with Him. And that's when the race of life began—in the Garden of Eden with our first parents, Adam and Eve.

While Genesis 1 offers a telescopic view of creation, chapter 2 presents a more detailed view.

The Baton Is Received Face to Face

In Genesis 2, we find that God created the first man of the dust of the ground. He breathed His own life into him, and the man became a living person. And then God created woman from man and gave the woman, Eve, to the man, Adam. So Adam and Eve lived together in the Garden of Eden in the visible presence of God.

Think about it. They knew God face to face. They knew the sound of His voice. They knew the touch of His hand. They saw the light in His eyes when He was with them. They saw the expression on His face when He was talking. They witnessed His strength and wisdom as He worked side by side with them. They knew God in a personal relationship. They knew firsthand that He was real, He was alive, and He was present in their lives. This was paradise. This was the Garden of Eden. This was their home.

Then the darkness of death and evil crept into the glory of creation and the perfection of paradise. The devil disguised himself as a snake that slithered up to Eve, tempting her to doubt God's word, then disobey what God had said. She fell for the temptation and led her husband, Adam, to do the same. As a result, sin entered the human race.

The snake had said that if they disobeyed God, they would be like Him in that they would know good and evil.¹ Following their sin, they knew good because they were separated from it. They knew evil because they were saturated in it.² Tragically, all who followed were born with a sin nature, which separates people from God to this very day.

In judgment for their disobedience, God removed Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. A holy God could no longer have fellowship with His beloved children, who had been created by Him and for Him.³ Their sin was a barrier.

The Baton Is Relayed Faith to Faith

Genesis doesn't give us details, but God must have told Adam and Eve that they could come back to Him by faith through a blood sacrifice. Later, His law clearly revealed that without the shedding of blood, there would be no forgiveness.⁴ All the sin offerings in the Old Testament were visual aids that pointed to the Lamb of God,⁵ who one day would be sacrificed on the cross to make atonement for sin. Each time someone presented a sacrifice in the Old Testament, it was as though God said, "I owe you forgiveness." The New Testament tells us that the blood of animals cannot take away sin, but Jesus did! His sacrifice, foreshadowed so long ago in the Garden of Eden, paid all the IOU notes in full.⁶

The requirement of a blood sacrifice seems to have been clearly communicated to Adam and Eve, because their second son, Abel, chose to approach God in that way and God commended him for it. Abel chose to receive the Baton.

There is no record of Abel teaching or preaching. At this early stage of history, there may have been few other people. Instead, he seems to have silently lived a righteous life that was very different from that of his brother Cain. Abel's witness has stood the test of time, influencing those who have followed, including you and me.

What caused Abel to choose to be a righteous man? I wonder whether it was the positive example of his own father within the home. Did Adam's absolute confidence in the reality of God influence his

son? Surely, although he was now separated from Him, Adam never forgot the touch of God's hand, the sound of God's voice, the expressions on God's face, the authority of God's spoken word. His faith in who God is and what God had said would have been unshakable because he knew God firsthand.

The Baton of Truth was relayed also to me by a positive example of faith within the home.

My own parents were so confident in who God is and what God has said that it never crossed my mind—nor, to my knowledge, the minds of my siblings—to doubt either God's existence or God's Word.

Both of my parents were raised by parents who were confident in God. My maternal grandparents were so confident in who God is and what God has said that they left everything in order to devote twenty-five years of their lives to establishing a hospital and caring for people in mainland China. Later, when they were run out of China by the Japanese and returned home to the United States, my grandfather established himself as a highly respected church leader and helped found two national Christian magazines.⁷

My paternal grandparents were so confident in who God is and what God has said that my grandmother taught a weekly Bible study in their home and my grandfather was instrumental in beginning rescue missions all across the country. My grandfather also met with other men in his city to pray that God would raise up an evangelist to the world, never dreaming that God's answer would be his own son.

Who has impressed you with his or her confidence in God? What a blessing to have parents and grandparents with confident faith. What a blessing to be a parent or grandparent with confident faith!

Whether or not it was Adam's example that inspired Abel, we do know that Abel made his own decision to live a righteous life. His decision to bring a blood sacrifice, when his brother Cain gave God whatever he felt like giving, revealed his receptivity to the truth and his obedience to God's word.⁸ Although he lived with parents who had rebelled against God and with a brother who was defiant, angry, and belligerent,⁹ Abel turned to God.

While we need to speak up and share the truth,¹⁰ a witness that is lived may be even more powerful than one that is spoken. It's not just what you and I say but who we are that catches the attention of those around us. As you read Rachel-Ruth's stories, this truth will be fleshed out in living color.

Abel's righteous witness provoked anger and jealousy in his brother Cain, who then rose up and murdered him. Abel's choice to live by faith in God was a silent witness for which he paid the ultimate price. Yet in doing so, he effectively passed the Baton to the next generation. It was for this witness that the writer to the Hebrews singled him out for commendation, saying, "By faith he still speaks, even though he is dead."¹¹ Abel's life, although brief, was not wasted. His faith in God, expressed through his silent witness, secured him an honored place in Hebrews 11, which is often referred to as the Hall of Faith.

Although to our knowledge Abel never married or had children, he did have a younger brother, born after he was murdered. Adam and Eve named this younger brother Seth, which means "appointed," because, as Eve said, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him."¹² Surely, as little Seth grew up, he was told about his two older brothers . . . about the lives they had lived . . . about the choices they had made. As a result, Seth chose to receive the Baton of Truth and passed it to his son Enosh.

What will people think of you when you're gone? What will your grandchildren know about you? Perhaps you see shadows of this ancient generation in your own family tree as you consider those who chose faith and those who did not. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, like Abel, you are remembered throughout generations to come as one whose life bore unmistakable witness to your faith in God? The choice is yours.

The following stories have been written to encourage and challenge you to think through the legacy you are building. The stories are written from Rachel-Ruth's perspective, drawing on her firsthand knowledge of parents and grandparents, and in them, you will learn about the powerful witness of previous generations that has borne rich fruit in her life. We pray you will be blessed.

Making the Most of Every Opportunity

Anyone familiar with Billy Graham—known to my family as Daddy Bill—knows he shared his faith boldly, without hesitation. Whether witnessing to individuals or preaching in a crowded arena, he did not speak with rehearsed precision. He spoke with passion and conviction because he believed every word he said with every fiber of his being! His deep love for Jesus was always evident in the fire in his piercing blue eyes and the passionate conviction in his familiar voice.

Thousands, even millions, came to faith in Jesus because Daddy Bill's passionate heart for the gospel came through in everything he said and did. Nothing brought him more joy than seeing someone come to Christ! My grandmother, whom we called Tai Tai, told my mom that she and Daddy Bill were once the guests of some friends at a beautiful beach resort. At dinnertime, no one could find Daddy Bill. When Tai Tai went looking for him, she found him behind their building, sharing the gospel with one of the groundskeepers.

My paternal grandfather, whom we simply called Grampa, also

shared the gospel with everyone with whom he came in contact, whether a pedestrian on a street corner in New York City, the person riding next to him on the subway, the waiter at the delicatessen he frequented, or one of the hitchhikers he often picked up for the sole purpose of sharing the gospel with them.

One Thanksgiving he and Gramma were driving down from New York City to spend a week with us. Mom had fixed a beautiful meal to enjoy upon their arrival. We waited and waited. When they finally arrived about eight hours later than expected, we learned Grampa had picked up a hitchhiker, then driven the guy to his destination—six hours out of the way—because Grampa wanted him to know Jesus!

He would say he “didn’t give a rip” about what people thought of him; he cared only about what Jesus thought of him. When we get to Heaven, I can’t wait to meet all the people who he led to Christ. At Grampa’s funeral, a man told my dad he had seen the notice of Grampa’s death in the paper and had come to the service because he wanted the family to know that Grampa had led him to Christ at the local McDonald’s, where Grampa went every morning for a cup of coffee.

It’s clear that the witness of my grandparents made an impact on both of my parents, instilling in them the importance of sharing the gospel at every opportunity.

When I was in elementary school, each Christmas my mom would come in to share the gospel through the Christmas story. I attended a public school that did not look favorably on the Bible or any type of Christian teaching. To share the Christmas story openly without using a Bible, my mom had to be creative. She had the clever idea of using the encyclopedia. As she sat surrounded by my classmates, teachers congregated in the doorway and the principal made a show of being present. But no one could argue with what the encyclopedia said about Bethlehem, the angels, baby Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. While writing this, I took a moment to look up the words *Jesus, Mary, Joseph, angel, cross, forgiveness, resurrection, heaven, eternity, and peace*

in the dictionary. And do you know what? The same thing is true! The explanations are right there. You can share the gospel from the dictionary! Try it the next time you feel led to share the gospel and someone tells you not to read the Bible in a public setting. Just thinking about it makes me smile.

The Lord has used my mom to share the gospel with many others over the years, including when she led Just Give Me Jesus revivals worldwide in large arenas. She always shared the gospel in the opening session, inviting people to come to the cross and pray with her to receive Christ. Over the years, hundreds of people streamed down to the platform. Her Friday night message on the Cross is the most powerful message I have ever heard. At every revival my mom not only focused on the audience but also had a burden for the production crew—the guys who worked behind the scenes with the lighting, the audio and video equipment, and the stage.

I remember one revival in particular that took place in the San Diego Sports Arena. The revival began Friday evening, then went all day Saturday, which also happened to be Mom's birthday. She gave three sixty-minute messages, emceed the program, then stayed almost two hours after the conclusion to greet people who lined up to speak and pray with her.

We had arranged to meet some special friends for her birthday dinner in El Cajon. She was to come straight to the restaurant from the arena. We waited and waited and waited. We finally went ahead and ordered our dinner. After we finished eating, Mom came in. We could all tell she was totally wiped out, but the sparkle in her eyes let us know she had been up to something special. And then she told us. As she was getting ready to leave the arena, she asked the guy who had handled her audio for the last five revivals whether he knew that his sins were forgiven and that he would be going to Heaven. He answered, "I'm not sure," to which Mom replied, "Would you like to make sure now?" He said yes! So Mom returned to the arena, sat down with him to answer his questions, then prayed with him as he confessed his sin, asked God to forgive him, and invited Jesus into his

heart. Mom said it was the best birthday present she could have ever received.

And then there's my dad. When he wasn't talking about the Lord, he was talking about the Yankees or football or Carolina basketball or a difficult patient he encountered in his work as a dentist. Dad just loved to talk. Many men were drawn to my dad because he was a big manly guy who would shoot straight with them. He told it like it was, whatever it was, just like the New Yorker that he was. He led several men's Bible studies, and he would randomly call on guys to answer questions, which meant they all came prepared every week for fear of embarrassment! Many men came to Christ in his Bible studies. Dad's faithfulness in leading was especially apparent the week that Hurricane Fran roared through our city, destroying the electrical grid and mangling the telephone wires. He walked the three miles to his Friday morning Bible study, found no one there, and never let the guys forget that they didn't show up when he did!

Sharing the gospel is not just for the evangelists and pastors of the world, like my grandfathers, or for Bible teachers and study group leaders, like my parents. Those who have placed their faith in Jesus are called to go and tell the good news to everyone: neighbors, cab drivers, professors, plumbers, coworkers, friends, family, and the list goes on.

I've been raised in a family where telling people about Jesus is as common as drinking water. My husband, Steven, and I have tried to instill that same priority in our three girls. They feel confident in sharing the gospel because they've seen me sharing the gospel just as I've seen my parents and grandparents sharing the gospel. Hardly a day goes by when I'm not trying to talk about Jesus or His Word with someone in my path. I'm not telling people about Jesus out of a weighty sense of duty. Sharing the gospel is not about reciting a rehearsed speech, performing a mechanical exercise, or repeating some formula. I talk about Jesus because I love Him! God's Word says, "Out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks."¹ God's love should flow out of our hearts, compelling us to share it with others in our everyday lives. So what does that look like?

My girls have shared the gospel with friends through text messages, with classmates at school, and with teammates on the practice field. They tell people about Jesus because they love Him.

My middle daughter, Sophia, had a high school tennis match at an opposing high school one hot September day. We took our puppy, Sader, along. He needed to get his wiggles out, and my youngest daughter, Riggin, was happy to oblige. Riggin has never met a stranger. She will talk your ears off! She is full of personality and loves the Lord with all her heart. She had already shared the gospel with multiple people in her young life. That day she noticed another girl who, like Riggin, was about ten years old and who also was there to watch her sister play tennis. They immediately struck up a conversation and began to walk Sader in the grass outside the tennis courts.

The two girls never stopped talking and never stopped walking. They even carried the puppy when he got tired as they continued to walk and talk. Over two hours went by. The tennis match ended, and I motioned for Riggin to head to the car. The girls hugged, smiled, and waved goodbye like dear friends. When Riggin jumped in the car, she exclaimed, “Mom, I just led Jane to Jesus!”² We all screamed with excitement! She explained that as they walked around the tennis courts, she began to tell her new friend all about Heaven. Riggin said the girl asked her a ton of questions, which she answered as best she could. She then asked whether Jane wanted to make sure she was going to Heaven one day and whether she wanted her sins forgiven. The girl responded, “Of course!” So Riggin stopped and prayed with her on the spot. To this day, they are close friends. Her mother has also become one of my dearest friends.

On another occasion, we were in Florida, visiting my husband’s family. My mother-in-law and I took my girls and our five-year-old niece, Annelise, to the Mall at Millenia on the south end of Orlando. It took us over thirty minutes to get there through traffic, which ended up being a divinely appointed drive. Riggin and Annelise were in the very back of the car. I knew they were talking the whole ride, but I couldn’t hear what they were saying. When we got to the parking lot,

Bell and Sophia, who had been listening from the middle row of seats, and Riggin, who was in the back row, started cheering and crying. Then Riggin explained to my mother-in-law and me that she had just prayed with Annelise, who asked Jesus to come into her heart. While driving to the mall!

Riggin has learned from her grandparents and great-grandparents the importance of sharing the gospel at every opportunity, even in the back seat of a car! The example of previous generations has been like seeds dropped in the fertile soil of Riggin's heart, bearing the fruit of a strong desire to pass the Baton of Truth to others.

My oldest daughter, Bell, has experienced much adversity in her friendships. She always takes a bold stand for the Lord and has been persecuted for it. Her friends don't seem to stick around for long. They can't handle being around someone who is strong in her convictions and cares more about doing the right thing than about being popular.

One night, before a particular friend group dropped her, she was able to share Christ with a girl who was interested in Christianity. Bell loves deeply and she loved this friend. She had been feeling compelled to share the gospel with this girl, and the conversation evolved naturally when the girl began to ask her questions about the Lord as they sat in their pj's at a friend's house at 2 a.m. The girl had been through a lot and seemed to soak up all that Bell shared with her. When Bell asked whether she would like to ask Jesus into her heart, the girl said yes. So, right there in that room in the middle of the night, Bell prayed with her to receive Christ!

Not long after, the same group of girls told Bell they no longer wanted to be friends with her because her faith in Jesus was too strong. We continue to pray for that girl, as the pressure so typical of teenage life today seems to be choking the budding faith inside her. Still, we know God placed Bell in that group for a season all because He loved that girl so much and He knew Bell would faithfully lead her to Jesus.

God brought a friend named Grace into Sophia's life. Her name is doubly sweet now because we know God wanted His grace to permeate her life. She was at our house for the weekend, which was a welcome and common occurrence. She has been through much difficulty in her young life, and I'm so thankful that God brought her into our home so we could love on her. That Saturday morning, I got the girls up somewhat early to go to a store across town. As I began to drive, the Holy Spirit nudged me to share the gospel with her. Sophia had been planting seeds in her life for a long time, and I felt that God was letting me know it was harvesttime.

I shared with Grace my testimony and how I could never have survived some of the difficulties in my life if I hadn't had Jesus. I told her that He loves her, adores her, and has plans for her. When I looked in the rearview mirror, I saw tears streaming down her beautiful face. She said she had just received a hurtful phone call from a family member that morning, and it meant so much to hear that Jesus loves her. After we parked at the store, I asked whether Grace wanted to ask Jesus to come into her heart, forgive her sins, and be her heavenly Father. She said yes! With all of us crying, she repeated the prayer after me and became a sister in Christ. She was radiant and said she felt immediate peace. We continue to carry her in our hearts and on our knees in prayer. We praise God that He extended His grace to Grace. And to each of us.

My family has had the privilege of witnessing our parents and grandparents unashamedly sharing their faith with those around them. I pray that my girls and I will continue to follow in their footsteps and offer the same example to our children and grandchildren.

Never ever do I want to shrink back from sharing the gospel. I want to carry on the fire of previous generations for reaching the lost—and you can join me! If you didn't have that example in your home, you can become the witness the next generation needs. You and I don't have to be professionals. Just Jesus Followers who lead others to Him.



**CREATING
A LEGACY OF WITNESS**

*Every morning, ask God to open your eyes
to someone who needs Jesus today.*

Be a Jesus Follower: *Share the gospel.*

Go and make disciples of all nations.

(Matthew 28:19)

Popcorn and Chocolate Milk

While sharing the gospel with our words is a vital aspect of running the race, I've learned that our compassion and vulnerability also witness to the grace of God at work in our lives. I learned this from my mother's consistent presence through my difficult teen years.

My high school experience was miserable. From the outside, our public high school in downtown Raleigh was a spectacular historic stone structure, but to me it was prison. To make matters worse, the big old building didn't have air-conditioning. North Carolina gets thick hot. That's how we describe air so hot and humid you could slice it up and serve it on a plate. This was especially true in early summer just before school let out and in late summer when school started. My homeroom was on the third floor facing downtown. Using toilet paper to wipe away the sweat pouring down her face, my homeroom teacher griped every morning that the "suits" downtown in their air-conditioned offices were the ones making the decision to keep us in school in inhumane heat. But the climate in the building wasn't the real misery; it was the fact that I was all alone in a school of 1,800 students.

In a way, my isolation was partially my choice. I've always been black and white in my walk with Jesus. Either you live for Him or you don't! During my midteens, that commitment left me on the fringes of high school society. The large number of friends I had going into high school quickly diminished because of peer pressure. I felt like I had become their conscience, and they either didn't want one or didn't want to be reminded that they had one. It wasn't that I told them how to live or condemned them for their choices. I just quietly chose not to go to parties or hang out with them when they were watching inappropriate movies. Shortly after I began to take that quiet stand, my friends started to turn their backs on me when I walked up to them in the halls at school. They stopped inviting me to do things with them. I was delighted one year to be invited to go to the beach with my friends for spring break, but wouldn't you know it? A week before the break, they disinvited me, saying the house was too full.

I used to beg my mom to write me a note to get out of going to school assemblies, because I had no one to sit with. When we had off-campus lunch, I sometimes drove to my dad's dental practice and ate my lunch in his office instead of going somewhere by myself.

My self-esteem was shot. Where I once was the life of the party, I now hardly said a word. But God in His infinite wisdom was working out His perfect plan. I realized at the time, praise God, that He was my best friend—He was the one I could talk to. I spent a lot of time in prayer before school and at night while I lay in bed, looking at the stars outside my window. He always knows what it will take to draw us to Himself. He gave me my life's verse while I was going through that difficult time, which is 1 Peter 4:12–13: “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” Eventually my heart absorbed the message. I wasn't a misfit. I was suffering for my faith in Jesus, and I shouldn't have been

surprised. He had a purpose for this hardship, and He would be glorified through it!

As tough as things were, God knew how to bring some relief and peace, even while the storm was still raging. He did that through my mother. Every day after school, my mom met me at the door of our home. We'd walk into the kitchen, sit down at our big lazy Susan table, and have popcorn and chocolate milk. I can still picture how the sun hit the pine trees outside the kitchen window in the late afternoon. My mom would ask how my day had gone. And then, many times through tears, I would share the painful stories of the day. She'd listen and cry with me, pray with me, laugh with me, and just be with me. Those afternoons were priceless. Of course, in God's perfect plan, He had another purpose in those afternoon talks beyond my immediate need for comfort. He knew that one day I would be a mother of three girls who would face their own disappointments and challenges and be in need of God's love channeled through someone who understands.

Even though I may not remember all the words my mom spoke to me on those afternoons as we ate popcorn and drank chocolate milk, I'll never forget the comfort she brought me and the security I felt in being able to pour out my heart to her. She never belittled my situation or waved me off in exasperation after hearing some of the same heartaches over and over. She was patient in my affliction. She set an example that has inspired me to do the same with my girls. I've sacrificed sleep on countless nights just to sit on their beds while they pour out their hearts. I've cried with them because what hurts them hurts me too. I've counseled them, silently praying for wisdom. I've held them, shared Scripture with them, prayed with them, laughed with them, and dreamed with them.

While I don't know the specifics of your circumstances or whether you've been blessed by someone who sat with you in moments of pain, I am certain that your compassionate presence can be a witness to God's love for someone—perhaps a child, grandchild, niece, or nephew—who is hurting. When you talk with people who are

experiencing difficulties, remember that Jesus is the ultimate example of a sympathetic presence that testifies of God's love. One of the scriptures I love to praise the Lord for is in Hebrews: "We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."¹ Jesus has been through it! He understands the suffering we are going through, because He has experienced it and handled it all without sin. What a comfort to know that Jesus understands! You and I should strive to be more like Him. Let's share our own hardships with others and let them know that we understand how difficult life can be. As we tell them how God brought us through something in the past or is carrying us through a challenge today, He will be glorified through the pain in our lives.

As witnesses to the grace of God, we can draw on the comfort we've received and encourage someone else going through something similar. Every situation we face has a purpose, whether we understand that purpose now or twenty years from now. He is trustworthy. He is reliable.

Now go share some popcorn and chocolate milk and a listening ear with someone who might need to hear your story.



CREATING
A LEGACY OF WITNESS

What painful experiences in your life has God redeemed, and how can you comfort someone facing similar hardships?

Be a Jesus Follower: *Be a good listener.*

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

(2 Corinthians 1:3–4)

To Face Our Fears with Faith

As much as I want to emulate the bold witness of my parents and grandparents, I have had to lean into God's power to overcome my natural reticence and fear. I'm thankful for the role my mom has played in that process, deliberately giving me opportunities even as a child and teenager to pick up the Baton of Truth.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, high school was hard for me in every way, and God in His mercy gave me multiple opportunities throughout my teens to travel with my mom. Each trip was unforgettable, but looking back on one particular travel experience when I was eighteen, I see that God was starting something in my life.

I fastened the straps securely over my chest as the pilot handed me earphones to drown out the noise of the rotor blades as they cut through the air. He climbed in beside me and began to push all kinds of buttons and levers in preparation for takeoff. My mom, who was no stranger to this adventure, sat behind me, relishing the chance to share this experience with me. I was focused on finding a motion sickness bag, wondering whether they even supplied those in the copilot's seat.

The pilot announced all was ready, and the helicopter lifted off, staying low to the ground, which only accentuated the sense of speed as we moved across the flat plain. As we sped above this expanse, the ground suddenly fell away. It felt as if the earth had dropped a mile down—and taken my stomach with it! There below us was the sparkling jewel of South Africa: Cape Town. Looking ahead, I saw the sun flickering off the ocean waves, like thousands of camera flashes in a stadium, while behind us the magnitude of Table Mountain was now visible. In the harbor below, huge ships were all lined up like fish anxiously awaiting feeding time. I could have jumped in there with them, because this was a feast for my eyes.

As captivated as I was by Cape Town's beauty, the real feast would be for my spirit after we were back on the ground. We were on this trip because my mom had been invited by a bishop in the Anglican church of South Africa, Frank Retief, and his wife, Beulah, to lead a conference at St. James Church in Cape Town. While she was busy preparing messages, I soaked in all the sights and savored the melodious South African accents, not realizing that God was about to open a door for me.

On the last day of the conference, my mom and the Reverend Retief asked whether I would be willing to give my testimony at the Sunday evening service. I had always been terrified of speaking in front of people. In fact, a speech class in high school almost paralyzed me with fear. At the start of the semester, the teacher had announced that, every day at the beginning of class, we would have to pick a slip of paper out of a bowl. On each slip was written a subject about which we would have to give a one-minute speech. One of the topics was to describe your first kiss. Having not yet had my first kiss, I was terrified to pick that slip of paper. My mom and I prayed for the whole year that I would never pick that topic, and I didn't!

As I considered the rector's invitation, I had to trust that the same faithful God who had held back the Red Sea for the Israelites and had held back that slip of paper for an entire school year would hold back my nerves that night in front of the congregation.

I remember thinking that there might be students in the audience who had a similar story and how encouraging it would be for them to know that they weren't alone. So I described what it had been like to be left out of conversations at school, to be ignored when walking down the halls, to notice classmates rolling their eyes as I walked to my car after school, and to spend each day counting down the minutes until school let out so I wouldn't have to hear everyone making plans for the weekend that didn't include me. I was alone because I had chosen not to compromise my walk with the Lord. I shared that, amid my loneliness at school, God had become my best friend.

My testimony that night wasn't anything spectacular, but I realize now that it was the beginning of God's call in my life. He is my Creator. He knows what gifts I have that may not be obvious, and with His gentle nudging, bit by bit, He has called me into a faith-filled adventure of witnessing to His goodness, whether on a platform or in my kitchen. Much like that helicopter ride, obeying His call can sometimes bring stomach-churning excitement. However, there are times when we have to obey God in the mundane situations we face every day at school, at work, or at home. Though I couldn't see it clearly at the time, I know God used my high school experience to focus my vision, exercise my gifts, and expand my usefulness for His glory.

I also learned the importance of trusting God in the face of fear and watching how He uses our difficulties for His own purposes and glory when we authentically give witness to Him.

Exactly one week after my mom and I spoke at that service in Cape Town, four terrorists stormed into St. James Church, shooting automatic rifles and lobbing hand grenades into that same Sunday evening service where we had spoken the week before. Eleven people were killed, and fifty-eight were injured. I was shaken to my core that this vibrant congregation had been so brutally attacked. I was also keenly aware that God had chosen to spare my mom and me. In the following days, God used that event to put a national spotlight on the people in that church. They came together in front of the world and forgave the attackers. South Africa was in the middle of dismantling apartheid,

and God used that horrific event to showcase forgiveness in the face of tremendous suffering. Subsequently the entire nation heard the gospel, with hundreds of people giving their lives to Jesus Christ.

I'm reminded that God has a plan for every part of our lives—every event, every moment of every day. I'm learning to trust His never-ending, all-encompassing faithfulness as I follow Him in obedience no matter what I'm facing. He knows the way I am to take. He has promised to lead me in right paths. And it's this steadfast trust in His leadership—in Him—through the ups and downs, the hard places and the good, that I want to pass on to my children.

Just as my mom urged me, I want to urge my girls to step out and bear witness to their faith, even if it seems as scary as the ground falling away on a helicopter ride, because then they will receive the blessing of experiencing His faithfulness firsthand.

Won't you join us by trusting God to use your story for His glory?



**CREATING
A LEGACY OF WITNESS:**

What frightening situation has God brought you through so that you can be a witness to the next generation of His faithfulness and goodness?

Be a Jesus Follower: *Share your testimony.*

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me; but you also must testify.

(John 15:26–27)

Running into Grace

A common misconception about my family is that since both of my grandfathers were evangelists and preachers, everyone in the family must be saints. In reality, we are all a bunch of sinners, making mistakes, in need of discipline and correction. The fact that you and I are fallible humans provides opportunities to be witnesses to God's grace, if we only listen to His leading.

When my mom was growing up and even when I was growing up, kids were allowed a lot more freedom than most have today. The freedom was good for developing magnificent imaginations but not so good when we were left to our own devices. Sometimes that led to bad decisions and tough consequences.

We grew up hearing stories about how, when being disciplined, my mom and her siblings would crawl out the windows of their locked rooms, step onto the roof, and climb over the top of the house in order to enter another sibling's room; or how my aunt Gigi slammed the courtyard door on my uncle Franklin, cutting off the top of one of his fingers; or how one of my mom's sisters forced her to go door to door in the autumn, selling colored leaves to neighbors who had yards full

of colored leaves; or how that sister hid behind a tree stump and threw mud balls at passing cars, then pushed my mom out to take the blame when the driver stopped the car and pronounced judgment.

I'm not sure our childhood fights ever reached the level of the epic battles that my mom had with her siblings, but we may have managed to come in a close second. I'm ashamed to say that Morrow and I could get pretty ugly at times.

One afternoon Morrow and I had gotten into yet another knock-down, drag-out fight. Usually when one of us did something to upset the other, we would draw an invisible line down the middle of the bedroom we shared and forbid the other person to cross it—or else. The “or else” usually involved throwing things or hitting each other. Really mature stuff. Unfortunately on this particular afternoon, I did something to push Morrow beyond the limits of her patience. She chased me out of our room, down the stairs, through the kitchen, and around the corner toward the back door.

Running for my life, I felt my heart pounding, my adrenaline pumping, and terror spurring me on. Still, Morrow was closing in fast. My memory of the scene is all in slow motion. As I rounded the corner, I could see the glass door ahead barring my way to freedom. I opened the latch as fast as I could, and in my adrenaline-fueled panic, I slammed it right as she reached me. What I hadn't anticipated in that moment of victory was that the glass would shatter on impact. Into a million shards. Much to my shame, I didn't even turn around to look. I knew I was as good as dead.

My mom and dad were so authoritative that George Washington, Napoleon, and General Patton all would have stood at attention and saluted if they ever heard their names called by either one. We always teased my mom that she had one particular look with the power to stop us as abruptly as if a pack of wolves had jumped in our path, making our insides go numb. My dad didn't take the time to even give us a look. He would whip out his belt and snap it in his hands before we could blink. While my parents certainly never abused us, they did execute judgment at appropriate times.

In the wake of the shattering glass, I didn't pause to catch a look, hear my name, or listen for the sound of leather. My sense of guilt and the certainty of the dire consequences to come sent me running to the best hiding spot I could think of: the back-seat floorboard of my mom's navy-blue station wagon. I roasted in the close confines of the stifling car. But I really started to sweat when I heard Mom calling me. Chills snaked up my spine, as if I were playing in some horror version of hide-and-seek.

My mom came into the garage, yelling my name. Eight years of obedience training had taught me to respond when being called. I knew I had stalled long enough. I opened the door of the car and climbed out, my face on fire from embarrassment and shame. My mom said in a booming voice, "Go to your room!" If she said anything else, I didn't hear it over the locomotive roar of blood rushing through my veins.

My parents must have known that solitude would give me time to think about my actions. I felt horrible as I wondered whether Morrow had gotten hurt. I also felt horrible as I wondered about the pain to be inflicted on my backside. I contemplated packing my pants with stuffed animals to cushion the sting of the spankings that were sure to come. As if my dad wouldn't notice the shape of Peter Rabbit under my sweatpants!

Then I heard the familiar creak of our stairs, and I knew my dad was coming. I braced myself for the look of disappointment and the inevitable consequences. Dad came in and sat down on the edge of my bed, causing the springs to squeak. I remember the lights weren't on, but the late-afternoon sun cast shadows across the room.

What happened next took me completely by surprise. "Rach, I want to teach you about grace," my dad said. "What you did was wrong. You deserve to be punished and spanked." (He even gritted his teeth dramatically when he said it.) "But instead of punishing you for breaking the glass door, I am going to take you to get ice cream."

I felt like time had frozen while my brain processed what I was hearing. I began to cry. Dad went on to explain that his grace to me was a picture of God's grace to us. We deserve death for our sins, but God sent His Son to the cross to take away our sins and give us eternal life.

When we place our faith in Him, we no longer live under the horror of knowing our sins are sending us to hell. Instead, because of His grace, we are forgiven and blessed, and we can walk in freedom.

I think that was the first time I truly grasped what grace is, and I've never forgotten it. So many times people run from God, like I ran from my parents. We want to hide because we know we are guilty. We are ashamed and afraid of the punishment that we surely deserve. The magnificent thing that no human brain can ever fully grasp is how deep and wide is God's love for us. He knows where we are hiding and why we are hiding. Yet He comes to us, wraps His arms around us, and extends His grace to us, covering our sin with His blood. He wipes away our sin—forever! His Word says so.

Before you can teach your children, grandchildren, or others to run to God, you need to run to Him yourself. When you do, you will find a loving heavenly Father who extends His grace to you. Once you've received His love and grace, it will be your joy and privilege to freely extend them to others.



**CREATING
A LEGACY OF WITNESS**

*What ungodly actions, words, or attitudes do you
need to confess to God so that you can receive
His forgiveness and walk in freedom?*

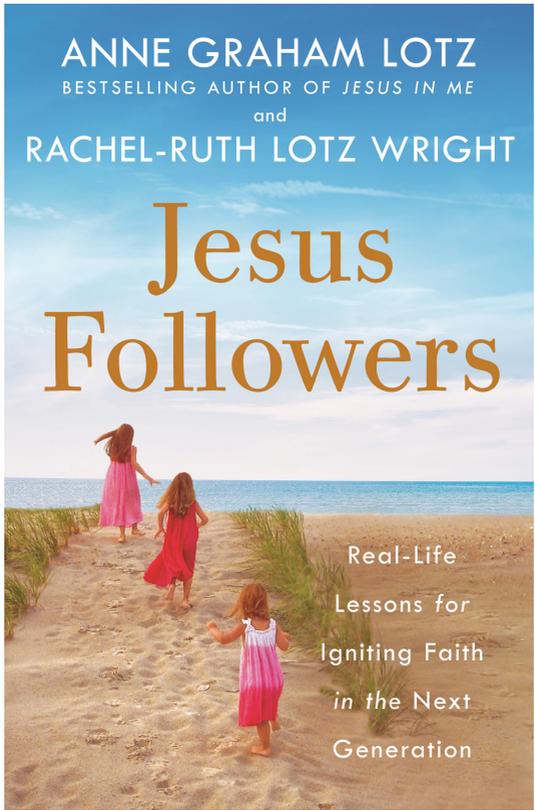
Be a Jesus Follower: *Extend grace.*

I will forgive their wickedness and will remember
their sins no more.

(Hebrews 8:12)

Freely you have received, freely give.

(Matthew 10:8)



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