

Riding the Waves

A young woman with long, straight blonde hair is seen from behind, holding a large surfboard. The surfboard is primarily pink with blue and white wavy stripes. She is standing on a sandy beach, looking out at the ocean under a bright, hazy sunset sky. The sun is a large, glowing orb on the horizon.

And other inspiring true stories for young adults

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John Howard

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Chapter One – Riding the Waves

Since the tender age of two or three, while most of us were graduating peek-a-boo and going through potty training, Bethany Hamilton was learning to surf. By the age of eight, she had entered her first major surfing competition, winning first place in her age group. This victory was her first in a series of ongoing victories, paving the road before her as a professional surfer. Young, talented, and with a promising career before her, the future looked bright for Bethany. For a moment, it seemed like nothing could go wrong, but as life typically goes, on the horizon loomed dark clouds.

On the morning of October 31, 2003, Bethany and two of her friends woke up early to go to Tunnels Beach, a popular surfing spot, for a morning surf. It was a beautiful morning, and they hit the beach just as the sun was beginning to rise over the water. As they paddled out into the ocean, lying belly down on their boards, Bethany put her hand in the water when a fourteen-foot Tiger Shark swept by and took her arm off, along with a chunk of her surfboard, leaving her helplessly bleeding and in imminent danger one mile from shore, in the presence of a hungry shark.

While you have likely never been the victim of a shark attack, you can probably empathize with Bethany. Most of us have at times felt as if we were drowning under the waves of some tragedy. You can probably relate to the words of the Psalmist who said, “You have afflicted me with all your waves” (Ps. 88:7). Waves of pain, heartache, and disappointment

sweep through all of our lives. Tragedy doesn't discriminate. It comes to us all in many different forms. Breakups. Divorce. Loneliness. Abuse. Disease. Disaster. Death. Like Bethany, you have been afflicted by a terrible pain that has left a scar on your heart that you cannot seem to forget.

You and I know all too well that life is full of trials. Pain and heartache are a natural part of life on this earth. But why? The Bible gives us the answer to this age-old dilemma. These waves of life are the terrible result of sin. The Bible describes those who persist in sinful lifestyles as "raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame" (Jude 1:13). Sin is deadly in its nature. You and I have been afflicted, and like Bethany, our only hope is to rise above it. The Bible says, "sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen. 4:7). Above the waves of sin, there is safety. Your only security rests above the waves.

One of the dangers of surfing lies in the mysterious underworld that rests just beneath the waves. Perhaps you have tried your hand at surfing. If not, just try to imagine. As you coast along on a thin slab of foam above the water, an entire world of creatures exists in that great abyss just beneath your feet. Some with poisonous stingers. Some with razor-sharp teeth. Some large enough to engulf a human body in one swallow. Rather unnerving, isn't it? Like the ocean, the Bible describes another world that is hidden from our view in the fourth dimension, where angels and demons dwell, and those who refuse to believe in this are the most susceptible to its danger.

While the surfer cannot focus solely on the dangers that exist just beneath them, out of sight, or they will be afraid to ever enter the water, there is the other extreme of denying that any danger exists. Similarly, those who are realistic must acknowledge that we have overwhelming evidence of spiritual elements in the fourth dimension, beyond what our eyes can see. We must be aware of this danger if we hope to survive this life and make it to the next. Still, even our awareness is not complete safety. We must do more than simply acknowledge a potential danger. We must learn how to live on another sphere, out of the reach of spiritual enemies. We must learn to ride above the spiritual waves that seek to pull us under.

Just as Bethany learned at an early age how to rise above the waves and became skilled at surfing, many people learned early in life how to rise above the waves of sin and temptation and become skilled at the word. They learned the importance of church, prayer, Bible study, and daily devotions. They said with the Psalmist, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11). They learned that what the surfboard is to the surfer, the Bible is to the Christian. As Bethany used the board to stay above the water, we must use the word of God to stay above the waves of sin. But something happened along the way. Over time, many of us became careless and lost sight of the dangers.

Many who have been raised up in the church slowly begin to dip into the waters of sin. A little drink of alcohol now and again. A little cuss word here and there. A little look at pornography. A little

white lie. It's just a little sin. *It's kind of fun*, you think, as you start to reason, *what's so bad about this?* In fact, the waters of sin are quite cool and refreshing for a moment. The desires of sex bring moments of strong emotion and ecstasy, but intimacy outside of marriage usually ends in bitterness, broken hearts, and loneliness. Violence may give a sense of power for a season, but it sinks the soul into guilt and despair. Just one arm in the water is all it takes.

While some use tragedy as an excuse to blame God, others turn to God for help. As Bethany drifted in the midst of the ocean, bleeding to death, she remembered her Christian upbringing and threw up a prayer for help. Then with her one remaining arm, she paddled to her friend, who led her back to shore. Immediately, a tourniquet was tied around her arm to slow the blood flow, but the situation was serious. She was taken to a hospital, where doctors worked tirelessly, as Bethany was put on a national prayer chain. As prayers ascended across the nation for the young shark attack victim, God answered. Against the odds, God delivered. But this is where some are tempted to stop reading. Why? Because God didn't for you. Where was God when your child got cancer? Where was God when your mother died? Where was God when your spouse left you and the thousand lonely nights you have suffered since? The same place He was when Bethany was bitten by a shark. You see, the story of Bethany could just as easily become a story of defeat, as it is a story of victory.

Bethany Hamilton could have spent her life lamenting her circumstances. Instead of telling a

story of a young girl who survived a shark attack, we could be telling the story of a young girl whose dreams were crushed at the tender age of thirteen. The difference is perspective. Bethany cheated death. Death didn't cheat her because she didn't let it. She could have blamed God, and she could have let the attack sink her into despair, but instead, within three weeks of the attack, she was back out in the water with her surfboard. The first few attempts were failures, but finally, she caught a baby wave into shore. It was her road to recovery. What about you?

The story of Bethany Hamilton is the story of defeat turned into victory. She is still scarred. So are you. Her blood cells still drift around in the waters. Perhaps your pictures still drift across the internet. For the rest of her life, she will suffer the results of her fall. Perhaps you will too. But get back up. Pick up your surfboard. It's okay. You may slip a couple of times as you are getting used to the waters again, but don't give up. Like Bethany, you can rise above the waves again. No. I don't mean you can just get by. You can live abundantly again, just like Bethany does. She still surfs. She still wins trophies. But now, she travels the world, speaking to young people all across the globe, affirming her faith in Christ. You see, what the devil took, God has restored, and more. And He can do it for you. You fell. You were scarred. You got hurt. It's okay. Get back up. You think you have gone too far. God doesn't think so. He wants to pick you back up. What are you doing just sitting here reading this? Get back out there. There's an adventure still waiting for you.

Chapter Two – The Tank Man

China was at the crossroads of change. There was a battle going on between the strict control of the ruling class and greater freedom for the people. When Hu Yaobang, one of the leaders pushing for change, was removed from office, then died shortly after, the government refused to pay him a state funeral, and groups of protestors surfaced. As the pot of political turmoil stirred, students began to rally. Frustration with the government, concern about the control the Communist party still had on the people, and desire for reform added fuel to the protest as groups continued to grow, staging their rally in Tiananmen Square.

The turmoil between protestors and the government came to a head on June 4, 1989, when the government decided to strike back, sending tanks into Tiananmen Square from every side, where they opened fire on the unsuspecting civilians, just like the devil has done to you so many times. Just when you are trying to make reforms in your own life, the devil gets angry and brings out the big guns. Overnight, the tide turns. Your boyfriend leaves you. Your parent dies. You're diagnosed with cancer. And the devil wins. And you are surprised because right always wins in movies. Truth always wins in books. That's why some people get angry at God. Because you thought that bad things weren't supposed to happen to good people, right?

The devil fires relentlessly, using any method he can to take you down. Drug addiction. Gambling.

Internet pornography. His bullets ripple through your alleys and down your streets. Bullets of guilt, despair, fear, anger, lust, deception, pride, and more hit, and you lie wounded on the sideline.

You thought I was going to say that the devil never wins, didn't you? He does. He has. If I tried to tell you that he doesn't, some of you would close the book. It would be a lie. The fact is, sometimes the devil does win. Sometimes lovers leave you. Sometimes parents die. Sometimes young kids overdose on drugs. Sorry. If you want a syrupy sweet tale, read *Cinderella*. In the real world, sometimes the devil wins battles. But don't worry. So did the South during the Civil War. So did the terrorists on September 11. So did Hitler in World War II. So did the Japanese when they attacked Pearl Harbor. Sure, sometimes the devil does win battles, but just hang in there. We know who wins the war.

Now, as the tanks leave, civilians lie dead in the streets. A war has been waged in Tiananmen Square, but the outbreak only enrages the protestors, adding fuel to their fire. Frustrated and angry, but silent and afraid, night falls on Tiananmen Square, just as it has fallen on you and me. In the darkness, you feel helpless. Bitter. Alone. Hope begins to fade away. But soon, the sun begins to rise. A new day begins to dawn, and it looks like you are going to have a second chance for a little while. But then you hear it again. You hear that hauntingly familiar sound of tanks rumbling down your street as the masses of people stand on the side of the road, paralyzed with fear.

Civilians and protestors cower on the sideline as a row of tanks rumble down the empty streets of Tiananmen Square when something completely unsuspected occurs. Amidst the eerie rumble of the machines, a young man steps forth. Into the lonely street, this unknown man positions himself right in front of the oncoming tanks. There he stands, face to face with near-certain death. Compelled by the scene, the people on the sideline watch in horror. They gaze ahead in amazement and fear, awaiting the young man's inevitable doom, but to the surprise and relief of everyone, it doesn't come. It's okay. You can open your eyes now, but you may not believe what you see. The tanks stop.

A young man stands before the impotent tanks. Who is he? Nobody knows. To this day, the identity of the man who stood up before the tanks in Tiananmen Square is unknown. He is a nameless, faceless youth. No one ever found out who it was. Perhaps it's better that way. He could be anyone. Just an ordinary average young person, like you, wandering through the crowds, standing somewhere along the sidelines of life, tired of sitting by and watching the violence and injustice spread, while everyone just stands there in silence doing nothing. What about you? Don't you think it's time to take a stand against the violence? Against the sexual assault? Against the lies? Giants of peer pressure barrel down your street. Giants of fear run your life. It's time to face your giants. It's time to take a stand.

Instead of being crushed, the leading tank stops, turns to the side, and starts forward again. In

defiance, the young man again moves in front of the direction of the tank. The tank stops. It turns again, and the young man again moves to block the tank. Several attempts are made to go around the young man. Repeatedly, the young man moves in the pathway of the tank. One spectator said she began to cry, knowing that the man was going to get crushed, but instead, something amazing happened. The young man stepped up onto the tank, stuck his head into the cockpit, and said to the driver, "Leave. You are not wanted here." Like the Tank Man, it's time we push back against the devil's assaults and say, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:23).

After his dialogue with the men in the tank, people from the crowd on the sideline rushed out and pulled him off the street. And as quickly as he came into our existence, he was taken, but his legacy lives on. In the midst of the horrible conflict, one single solitary moment of time was immortalized when a young man decided to take a stand against the current tide and trends that were corrupting his country, even in the face of adversity or death.

It's easy to stand for causes when you have a mob around you, but where are those who are willing to stand alone for things that are not politically correct? While many are willing to protest popular causes and stand up for politically correct policies, is anyone willing to stand up for real values? Is there anyone brave enough to stand against pride, lying, foul language, sexual immorality, violent movies, marijuana, drunkenness, drugs, pornography, or other things that are destroying the nation? Anyone?

As the morals of the nation plummet, sexual and violent content in movies and music skyrocket. Disrespect to parents and authority figures dominates the culture. Is it any wonder that many of the young people today are dying of depression and loneliness in this broken world? Silently, in desperation, some turn to drugs and alcohol to rescue them, all the while wondering, ‘Oh Tank Man, where are you?’ Where are the young men and women who are sick and tired of watching the values and principles of our nation rot away to the core? Where are the young men and women who are disturbed by the falling standards of society? Where are the men and women who are willing to stand up for what is right in the face of adversity or even death? Tank Man, where are you?

So where is the Tank Man? Is he wandering somewhere around the streets of China, rescuing children from fires? No. He is found in every young man who says ‘no’ to the bottle in the face of peer pressure. He is found in the heart of every young woman who determines to preserve her sexual purity when pressured to give in. Every time you choose to dress modestly. Every time you show respect to your parents and dignity to your peers. Every time you guard your tongue from gossip or foul words. It’s you. While the national moral standards continue to fall, tank men and women stand on the sidelines getting ready to make their stand. Even as we speak, they are making their way out of the sidelines. They are pushing their way through the crowd. The battle is heating up. But watch closely. The youth are getting ready to stand. How about you?

Chapter Three – The Thai Cave Rescue

The Wild Boars school soccer team had just finished practice on Saturday, June 23, 2019, and Coach Ake agreed to take them on an expedition into the Tham Luang Cave in Thailand. From the onset of the journey, the cave was aligned with warning signs, which the boys were aware of. The warnings especially cautioned against entering the caves during the monsoon season. Despite the warnings, the group made their way into the cave, wandering deeper and deeper into the cracks and crevices of the rocky passage towards their impending doom. Like the warning signs at the entrance of the cave, God has given us signs warning us of the impending dangers of sin, appealing to us to stay away, and yet so many, like the Thailand boys, ignore the warnings, and wander into the caves of sin anyway. Thinking it will be fun, they gradually wander deeper and deeper into the recesses of sin until it has them trapped in a desperate and deadly situation.

As the boys made their way deeper into the cave, the rains outside began to flood the route, and they found themselves trapped. Two and a half miles into the cave, the boys made their way onto an elevated ledge where they found themselves surrounded by water with no way out, like so many of us. You thought you would just have one drink, one smoke, one look, one lie, or whatever it was that started you on the road towards your crisis, but the pleasures of sin allured you deeper and deeper until you realized you were trapped, with no way out.

At once, the boys determined that they would assert themselves and dig their way out. Taking turns, they continued to dig through the mud walls every day in a desperate attempt to save themselves, but in spite of their best efforts, saving themselves was an utter impossibility. So many of us make the same mistake on a spiritual level. Like the trapped boys, we find ourselves trapped in some sin, but instead of turning to God and crying out for His saving grace, many start digging. We say, "I can beat this sin on my own." We make resolutions and try to quit, but we don't want to give our lives to Christ, so we dig. Still, finding that our efforts are futile, many resolve to tame their sins, thinking they have them under control while they continue to run their lives.

When one of the mothers reported that her son was not home on time, the local police searched and found shoes and bicycles at the entrance of the cave, followed by the boy's footprints. Soon afterward, the search began. The best navy SEAL divers from across the world arrived at the cave to assist in the rescue, representing America, Australia, Europe, Thailand, and China. A worldwide effort was underway to rescue the trapped kids, ranging from ages eleven to seventeen.

Similarly, in spite of your efforts to save yourself, God is on His way to get you out. Just as the news of the trapped boys resounded across the globe, the news of the fall of humanity resounded through the heavens. When planet earth fell into sin, heaven stopped what it was doing and focused all its attention and energy on planet earth, preparing for the

greatest rescue mission of all time. Just as the world pulled all its resources together for the rescue of these boys, heaven has focused all of its resources on the rescue of this lost world.

For several days, plans were drawn to initiate the rescue of the trapped boys. Different options were considered. Many drilling attempts were made to locate the boys. Plans were laid as rescue workers slowly made their way deeper and deeper into the cave over the following days. At this point, no one knew if the boys were still alive as they continued the search, but everything was temporarily stopped as another succession of heavy rains came in and hindered the efforts to find the boys, much like the storms that arise in our lives.

So often, we become trapped in a crisis, and just when it seems like it can't get any worse, another storm sweeps through. You lose your job, and while you are scraping for money, trying to figure out how you are going to make the bills, your spouse decides to leave you. Your pet dies, then you are diagnosed with cancer. You wreck your car and then find out that you missed your insurance payment. When it rains, it pours. Just when things seem like they can't get worse, something else happens, and your faith is shaken to the core. As the rain falls and the water fills the cave, the danger becomes more imminent. Still, the boys inside are unaware of the level of danger.

From within, the boys don't see what is happening. They seem to think that somehow they will survive and are able to remain calm without fully recognizing the gravity of the situation, but the way

out is hard. Some of the passages are very narrow and extremely difficult to pass through, especially once flooded. Similarly, we do not realize the gravity of the situation we are in. Sin has hurled this planet into a hopeless situation. The Bible says that the majority will not survive because “narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:14). In spite of the danger, most people do not realize the seriousness of the situation they are in from their little caves of sin. They cannot see the level of danger from their perspective as the situation grows more hopeless.

Eventually, rescue efforts resumed, and after nine days, the boys were finally discovered alive. Immediately, food and medical supplies were sent in, but getting the boys out would be more difficult. At its deepest level, the divers had to cross under a murky channel about the length of seven Olympic-sized swimming pools, completely immersed in water. While some of the passages were shorter, there were several levels that dipped completely under the water, making the rescue extremely dangerous. The rescue workers expected to lose some of the kids, while the Thailand government warned that up to half of them might die, but the longer they waited, the worse their chances of survival were.

After the rain passed, there was a short break with no rainfall, but oxygen levels continued to drop. Oxygen tanks had to be sent in and placed throughout the cave to prepare for the rescue.

Among those delivering the tanks was former Thai Navy SEAL, Saman Kunan, who had come out

of retirement to assist in the rescue efforts. On the evening of July 5, after delivering three oxygen tanks to one of the chambers, his own air supply ran out, and he lost consciousness, dying from lack of oxygen. As tragic as his death was, it is a beautiful gesture and fitting illustration of what Christ has done for us. Just as Kunan died from a lack of oxygen, giving his oxygen for others to live, Christ took our death so we could have His life.

The death of Saman Kunan gave a sense of the true gravity of the situation. After this, everyone realized the imminent danger that existed, and efforts cautiously went forward. Another series of rains were expected to begin on July 11, forcing rescue efforts to begin at once. On July 8, a group of thirteen international divers entered the cave to begin the rescue. Over the next few days, the boys were slowly brought out, but the process was long and dangerous. Each day, four boys were brought out of the cave, giving intermittent time between rescues to replenish the supplies. On July 10, the last of them was rescued, and after spending some time in the hospital, the boys were finally sent home.

Like the boys, so many of us wander into the caves of sin one little step at a time until we find ourselves trapped. Our situation is hopeless. Our sins have paved the path to our death, but like Saman, Someone has died for us to supply us with oxygen to live again. Now it's our turn. The rescue workers are here, but we have to consent to be rescued. If you will consent to give your life to Jesus, He will see you safely home. Isn't it time to go home?

Chapter Four – Amazon Survivor

Juliane Koepcke was raised in Lima, Peru, but at fourteen, her parents moved to the Amazon jungle to study wildlife. Here, Juliane was trained early on how to survive in the wild. Spending much of their time in the jungle, she was taught different survival techniques from her father, perhaps not fully realizing the role these skills would play in her near future. While her parents had taken to homeschooling her, the school system demanded that Juliane get a formal education, and she was eventually sent back to Lima to complete high school, but it was her survival training that would eventually save her life.

Upon graduating at the age of seventeen, Juliane and her mother tried to book a flight back to their Amazon home, but being so close to Christmas, all the flights were booked, except LANSA Airlines, which had been plagued with two recent accidents. Because of its poor reputation, Juliane's father urged them to avoid flying with LANSA, but in order to get home by Christmas, they booked a flight through the airline for December 24, 1971.

The flight started off smooth, but soon the skies began to grow dark, and they were confronted with some turbulence, which rapidly grew worse. Before long, they were enshrouded in the midst of a terrible storm as the plane shook violently in the wind. Juliane looked out the window to see lightning strike the wing, which ignited a fire in the engine. Moments later, the right wing tore off, sending the plane into a steep decline. Juliane recalls the screams turning to

silence as she plummeted towards the ground. Her seat had broken off, and she was outside the plane in a freefall while still strapped in her seat. She recalls briefly looking down at the trees below as she hurled to the earth. Then everything went black.

Nearly the entire first day after the crash, Juliane drifted in and out of consciousness. Eventually, she awoke to find herself wounded but still alive, just like you when your tragedy struck.

No, probably none of us have been through the harrowing experience that Juliane went through, but there are many spiritual elements in her experience that we can all relate to. As Juliane was taught survival skills early on, many of us were taught spiritual survival skills on how to survive the spiritual assaults that the devil tries to throw into our lives. Many young people had the Bible as a spiritual guidebook. We were taught the importance of prayer. We went to church, and everything was going great until the demands of secular education led us away.

While Juliane's father tried to teach her survival skills, the educational system protested and demanded that she get a formal education. Ironically, if Juliane had not returned to her secular school, she would not have been on the plane and suffered that deadly fall. Similarly, many young people have been led to deadly falls as a result of secular education today. Fortunately, Juliane's father had taught her the techniques that would help her survive the fall

Just as Juliane's father taught her survival techniques, the only way young people will be able to survive the deceptive teachings that have swept into

the modern schools and universities is if they have learned spiritual survival techniques. Unfortunately, most do not have a strong foundation and end up being swept away by worldly philosophy, which eventually leads to their fall.

What is perhaps most tragic about Juliane's accident is that her father had warned them not to use that airline, but they disregarded the warning. What a fitting illustration of humanity. God has given us warnings in His word to avoid sin, but we so often take these warnings far too lightly, not realizing the horrible dangers. As a result, we are all falling to our eternal death. The Bible says that "sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (Jas. 1:15). And yet, amazingly, like Juliane, we survived.

While some have tried to calculate how Juliane survived, there is no real explanation for her survival. By all accounts, she should have died. People don't fall ten thousand feet from the sky, at hundreds of miles per hour, and survive, but there she was, and there you are. The truth is, you and I should be dead too. We have all fallen into sin, and all of us were hurling towards eternal death with no hope of life. When we sinned, we lost out on our chance of living forever, but then God stepped in. Just as Juliane got a second chance at life, Jesus died for us to give you and me another chance at eternal life.

While Juliane survived the initial fall, she found herself alone in a remote jungle. Like Juliane, perhaps at times, you feel all alone. Perhaps sin has led you deep into the forest of despair, and you can't seem to find your way out. Perhaps you feel like even

God has left you as you wander, broken and alone, in the midst of your jungle. In spite of your feelings, you are not alone. God knows where you live (See Acts 9:11). He sees your every tear (See Ps. 56:8).

While Juliane had miraculously survived, she was not out of the woods yet. Now she had to rely on the skills her father had taught her. The most valuable skill that Juliane's father taught her was to stay near water. If Juliane could find her way to water, she would eventually find people because people migrate to water. So, when Juliane found a stream, she began to follow it, making her way along the bank.

What an amazing spiritual lesson this is! When speaking to the woman at the well, Jesus referred to "rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit" (John 7:38, 39). Just as Juliane was to walk where the water is to find life, we are to "walk in the Spirit" to find eternal life (Gal. 5:25).

Trusting the advice of her father, Juliane continued to make her way downstream, but the forest was harsh. She was surrounded by insects that left blistering bites on her arms and legs. Crocodiles occasionally appeared, but she was able to avoid them. Camouflaged snakes likely hid in the weeds around her, but fortunately, she was not confronted by any as she searched for help. And as we make our way through the jungle of this world, dangers also lie all around us. Some dangers present themselves clearly, while others are out of sight. All the while, the merciful hand of God protects us.

By the tenth day in the forest, Juliane felt weak. The food she had recovered in the wreckage was now

gone, the sun was hot, her wounds were worse, and her willpower was waning. Feeling abandoned, she spent the day drifting down the river until she came upon a gravel bank, where she decided to take a short rest. Later, upon opening her eyes, she spotted a boat. Making her way to the boat, she then saw a little path which she followed to a nearby abandoned hut, where she was able to lie down and further rest.

The next day, after no one appeared, Juliane considered moving on, but feeling too weak to continue, she decided to stay another night. At dusk, Juliane was awakened to voices approaching, sounding to her as the voice of angels. When Juliane was at the end of her strength, her rescue came. In the same way, when we reach the end of our strength, God is just starting. He says, "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Victory often comes when all else looks like defeat. God often waits this long so that we will be able to see our helplessness and recognize that we are not saved by our might but by His strength.

When she explained what had happened, the men took her into town where she was escorted to a local hospital and cared for. After a day, she was finally reunited with her father and eventually able to return home. And one day, if we continue to move forward, like Juliane, we too can be reunited with our Father in our heavenly home. Like Juliane, we must find the living water, walk in the Spirit, and make our way towards our heavenly home. If you have not started, why don't you start that journey right now by thanking Jesus for saving you from your deadly fall?

Chapter Five – Rescue at Sea

April 18, 2019, was senior skip day at Christ's Church Academy in Jacksonville, Florida, where 17-year-old Tyler Smith and Heather Brown attended school. Both preparing to graduate and enlist in the military, they decided to head to Vilano Beach to test their endurance by swimming deep into the Atlantic Ocean. As they set out on their venture, they were still feeling good, but by the time they decided to turn back, they had drifted too far. Now the current against them was too strong to fight. No matter which direction they tried to swim, they were only pulled further out into the ocean, and they found themselves in a desperate condition, like so many of us today.

While senior skip day is meant to be harmless fun, the seemingly innocent act of rebellion led to disaster and nearly death, like so many of the sins we wander into. Like Mike and Heather, many young people today continue to wander into innocent forms of rebellion, thinking they are small and harmless. We like to give our sins cute names to make them sound harmless, like “little white lies,” or “getting a small buzz,” as if new terminology can change the nature of the beast. But no matter what we call it, sin is still sin.

Whatever the sin is, once it hooks you, it pulls you against your will, like the current of the ocean, until you are so far lost that you can no longer save yourself. One drink is all it takes to make an alcoholic. One look is all it takes to get you hooked on porn. One lie is all it takes to suck you into a web

of lies, and you are hooked by the current of sin, as Satan lures you further and further from God's shore.

No matter how innocent it appears, sin always ends in disease, depression, despair, and ultimately death. That's why the Bible says, "the wages of sin is death," and "sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death" (Rom. 6:23; Jas. 1:15). What we often think is innocent fun is the very thing that ends up bringing us the most pain and misery in life. While God's will is the path to peace, joy, fulfillment, and ultimately eternal life, so many people take the broad road to destruction, getting swept away by the current of sin until they can no longer escape.

So there they were, stranded nearly two miles from the shore, treading water, as they were slowly being pulled further and further into the deep, just like so many of us. Like Mike and Heather, the waves of sin leave us bewildered and disoriented until we no longer remember the way back. The memories of church bells and Bible studies drift around us. Little images of our Christian past drift across our minds, but we cannot recall the way back as we helplessly tread water, simply waiting to be overtaken by the waves.

As Mike and Heather continued to tread water, lost two miles off of the coast of Florida in the Atlantic Ocean, they began to lose hope. The condition appeared to grow worse. Two hours had passed, they were quickly losing strength, and the water was cold, but what a beautiful spiritual position to be in—broken and helpless. While the world views this condition as weak, God is trying to get us into

this position so that we will see our need for help and cry out to Him. This is a place of hope.

Seeing their hopeless condition, Tyler began to draw on his Christian upbringing. In a desperate plea for help, he threw up a prayer, appealing, “God, if you really have a plan for my life, send help and rescue us.” Hearing Mike pray, Heather then began to join in as the two prayed together for God’s intervention.

This should be a lesson to all of us. So often, our faith sparks the faith of others. When you bow your head in a restaurant, some may get angry, but others will be inspired to follow your example. Mike’s prayers inspired Heather to join in, and the Bible says, “where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). Amazingly, as soon as the two began to pray, hope appeared on the horizon.

Looking up, the couple saw a boat heading in their direction, and they began to cry out for help. Similarly, when we see our helpless condition, recognizing that our sins are leading to eternal death, God says, “Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you” (Jer. 29:12). When we pray, Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, will hear us and come to rescue us, just like Captain Eric Wagner. As the boat passed, Captain Wagner faintly heard Heather’s muffled screams above the sound of the wind and the waves. Looking back, he saw an arm flailing in the water and realized someone was in danger. Fortunately, God had placed this man in the right place, at the right time.

In so many ways, this Captain is a symbol of what every Christian should be. Like Kyle and Heather, there are perishing souls all around us, drifting helplessly in the great ocean of sin, preparing to be swept under by the waves of eternal death, and yet so many of us are deaf to their cries, making little to no effort to save the lost. We make excuses like, “It’s too windy out today,” “The waves are too strong,” or “I’d rather stay inside where it’s comfortable,” while lost souls are helplessly stranded all around us. Or perhaps we sit inside our boat, enjoying the Christian journey to heaven, without keeping our eyes on the ocean and staying alert to those in peril on the waters.

As Captain Wagner sailed across the Atlantic, his ear was open to the faint cry of Heather. In the same way, we must have our ears open to the faint cries of the lost all around us. We must be looking for souls who are seeking to be rescued. We must be watching in the distance for arms flailing above the waves in a desperate appeal for help, ready to throw a line to those around us. We should be ready to give a tract or a book, share a Bible verse, pray with others, or talk of Jesus to those who are willing to listen.

You should “always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). “Be ready in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Spotting the desperate couple, Captain Wagner at once began to turn the boat back around for the rescue as Kyle and Heather looked on with joy at their approaching deliverance. Pulling up next to

them, the crew threw down the line, but the weary teenagers did not even have enough strength to climb up, so the crew pulled and pushed them up to safety. Similarly, we have no strength to save ourselves. Our deliverance comes when our strength is gone, and we see our utter helplessness to save ourselves.

Pulling the couple on the boat, the first words Heather said were, “God is real,” to which Captain Eric Wagner revealed to them that the name of His boat was “Amen.” The irony was too much for Heather, who at once burst into tears at the goodness of God. Similarly, when we are saved by the grace of God and see His goodness, we are brought to tears of joy and repentance. What a beautiful illustration of salvation. Eric and Heather were rescued, not by their own strength, but by grace, in answer to their prayer of faith. Immediately, when they got on the boat, their cold and almost naked bodies were covered with warm blankets, just as Christ covers our nakedness with His righteousness. Finally, the captain took them home in the same way that God takes us on a journey to our heavenly home.

Isn't it time you return home? Perhaps you somehow have drifted out into the ocean of sin, trapped by circumstances, and been sucked into some terrible place. The good news is that God is just a prayer away. God is preparing to pass by, but you must cry out to Him. Call out to Him, and He will answer. Heaven is waiting. God is longing to take you home. We are on the shores of eternity, and God is longing to rescue you and bring you safely to your heavenly home. Won't you call on Him today?

Chapter Six – The White Rose

Hans and Sophie were the second and fourth children of Robert Scholl, the mayor of a little German town. Growing up during the rise of the Third Reich, the children soon began to form strong political philosophies. With its high promises of bringing Germany back to national greatness, the children were lured into the Hitler Youth movement, which maintained a high moral standard. Those who participated in this group were not permitted to smoke or drink alcohol. They dressed modestly and spoke politely. They were raising the standard for German youth, striving for excellence, and Hans and Sophie were compelled to join. But soon enough, the organization began to show its true colors.

Hiding behind the facade of moral excellence was the stain of anti-Semitism. Sophie was quickly turned off by the anti-Semitic standpoint that was taken by the group, which would not allow her Jewish friends to join, but her animosity against the regime grew more determined with the horrors of Kristallnacht and the outbreak of the war. Soon, rumors of concentration camps began to leak to the public, and signs began to display themselves outwardly. Still, it was not until Hans witnessed a Nazi soldier spit on a young schoolteacher for refusing to join the party that his affection was finally withdrawn from the group. Hans and Sophie decided it was time to stand up against political correctness and defy the popular social club of their day. How about you?

The Hitler Youth movement was based on an external form of morality. They had actually convinced themselves that they were good, moral defenders of truth and believed their opponents were the enemy, even while they were filled with hatred in their hearts. Tragically, this attitude still lives today. Like the Hitler Youth, we flatter ourselves that we are morally superior. The proof is that we look down on the rapist, murderer, misogynist, racist, and others, as if we were better than them, when our sins have crucified the Son of God.

Like the Nazi Youth, we pride ourselves on our morality while we live as hypocrites. We claim to promote love and peace, while we chant out of hate. We protest gun violence, and then go to movies filled with violence, or play violent video games. We get angry because some people treat women like sex objects, but we say nothing when women dress and behave immodestly in public, doing sexually explicit dances, wearing next to nothing, and even exposing themselves in public, on film, or on social media.

Still, there is another group, like Hans and Sophie, who see that this external morality is only a façade. It is only an outward “form of godliness” (2 Tim. 3:5). They see that at heart, they are no better than the rapist and murderer. They say, “I know that in me... nothing good dwells” (Rom. 7:18). As they look at the sinners around them, they are willing to say with the great Methodist preacher, John Wesley, “If not for the grace of God, that would be me.” They say with the tax collector, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). It is only once we are willing to

see our own sinfulness that we will be able to look at all humans as equal—no better or no worse.

Just like the two groups in Nazi Germany, two groups still exist today. Both groups hold a standard of morality but with extremely different views. One lives by the world's standard of morality, achieving it in their own strength. As a result, they take credit for their goodness and look down on others who do not attain to the same level. The other group lives by God's standard of holiness, depending on God for power to live godly lives. As a result, God gives them power to attain to a higher standard than morality, but since they credit God for their achievements, they recognize that they are no better than the greatest of sinners. That's why they can show sympathy to the murderer, rapist, drug addict, prostitute, and other sinners while living above the standard of morality.

When Hans and Sophie left the organization which promoted external morality, they formed a peaceful resistance group called the White Rose to oppose the horrors of the Nazi regime. Similarly, when we turn from our own morality, we too must not simply remain silent on the sidelines. We must become joint-heirs with Christ. We must not remain passive and silent. We must join the opposing side and fight against the forces of evil. There are too many silent witnesses standing on the sidelines. God is looking for people who will stand up against the evils of society and make their voices heard, and this is exactly what Hans and Sophie did.

The White Rose at once began to prepare literature to distribute, exposing the evils of the Nazi

regime. While their efforts were peaceful and non-violent, they knew that this would anger the enemy, but Sophie retaliated, "So many people have died for this regime that it's time someone died against it."

Similarly, when we turn from the devil, we too must begin to expose the snares of Satan in a peaceful and non-violent manner. There is no question this will ignite the wrath of Satan against us, but the world must be rescued from this evil regime by whatever means we can. If you are not good at talking to people, pass out books and leaflets, as Hans and Sophie did. While many sat in silence on the sidelines, they ignited a leaflet campaign, passing out anti-Nazi literature across Germany.

The group had launched five leaflet campaigns and was preparing their sixth, calling students to resist the advances of Hitler in Germany. On February 18, 1943, Hans and Sophie decided to personally distribute the brochure between classes at the University of Munich. The two made their way across campus, leaving the leaflets on windowsills, bookshelves, and wherever else they could. Finishing just in time for the classes to let out, they were spotted by a university caretaker, caught, and handed over to the authorities to await their trial.

Four days later, on February 22, 1943, the four-hour trial went underway. At its close, the two were sentenced to hanging. In one final meeting with their children, Robert embraced his son one last time and muttered the words, "You will go down in history. There is another justice than this." To Sophie, the dear mother whispered painfully, "I'll never see you

come through the door again.” Bravely, the young Sophie looked by faith beyond this life and replied, “Oh Mother, after all, it’s only a few years more life I’ll miss.” And at this, they were taken away.

While Hans and Sophie died the day of their trial, Germany could not silence them. After they were buried, the words appeared on the cemetery wall in brash defiance of the injustice of their death: “Their spirit lives.” Indeed, their spirit still lives today. It lives in those who turn their heads from sexual scenes on television and the internet. It lives in the hearts of young women who turn the station when a lewd song comes on the radio. It lives in the hearts of young men who keep their tongues pure when tempted to say bad words. It lives in the hearts of young women who dress modestly, not from a sense of moral superiority but in humility. It lives in those who are willing to stand up for what is right, even when it is not politically correct.

While Germany sought to silence this young couple by putting them to death, their death only magnified their cry. The death of Hans and Sophie did to the cause of the White Rose what the death of Jesus did to Christianity. It did not silence their words. It immortalized them on the pages of history, sealed by their blood. Following the death of Hans and Sophie, the allies obtained a copy of one of their leaflets and dropped millions of copies out of their airplanes over Germany. Yes. Their spirit lives. It lives today in every movement that stands for truth and liberty. It lives today in every hope of peace and longing for justice, inspiring us.

Riding the Waves Discussion Questions –

What evidence have you seen of the invisible world?
Share your ‘shark attack.’ Did it affect your faith?
Share a verse that helps keep you above the waves.
Discuss some reasons God allows pain and suffering.

The Tank Man Discussion Questions –

Share a time you were wounded by Satan’s bullets.
Share a time you had to go against what was popular.
Tell about a ‘tank man’ or ‘tank woman’ you admire.
What can we do to stem the tide of immorality?

The Thai Cave Rescue Discussion Questions –

How is trying to dig out of the cave, like us with sin?
What does it mean when some ‘try to tame sins’?
Discuss some spiritual dangers society faces today.
Tell a time your faith was shaken. What did you do?

Amazon Survivor Discussion Questions –

Share early spiritual survival techniques you learned.
Read 1 Timothy 6:20. Discuss dangers of education.
Read Galatians 5:25. How do we ‘walk in the Spirit’?
What do you look forward to in our heavenly home?

Rescue at Sea Discussion Questions –

Discuss God’s laws in light of John 15:10-11.
If God knows all, why does He wait until we pray?
Share a God moment when you sensed ‘God is real.’
Share ways you’ve seen God’s goodness in your life.

The White Rose Discussion Questions –

Read 2 Timothy 3:5. What is a “form of godliness”?
How is seeing our sinfulness one key to equality?
Share ways to ignite a ‘Jesus campaign’ in your area.
Talk about different methods of sharing the gospel.

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