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CHAPTER ONE

The Thirty-Seven Silent Voices

RAY of Light

You are about to embark on perhaps the greatest adventure of your young life, and this chapter will certainly put that journey into perspective. There are a lot of ways you'll find yourself growing as you read this book, but it all starts with the "why"—why should you reach out? This chapter will shed a crucial light you'll need for your path.

Plenty of crimes were getting attention in the 1960s, but one murder case stood alone in its ability to shock the country. The crime was not the most gruesome, but to many it seemed more tragic. In the spring of 1964, a twenty-eight-year-old woman fell victim to her worst nightmare while her neighbors did nothing.

She was coming home from work in the early hours of the morning when, not far from her apartment building, a man attacked her. The man repeatedly stabbed her with a knife as she let out terrified screams, "Please help me! Please help me!" Some apartment lights went on in nearby buildings. Shortly after, the attacker walked away. In the silence of the night the sobbing victim struggled to her feet. The woman, bleeding badly from several stab wounds, managed to reach her building. Within minutes, the attacker returned.

He stabbed her again. “I’m dying! I’m dying!” she cried. Lights came on again and a few apartment windows opened. The attacker then ran to his car and drove away.

Bleeding profusely, the woman stumbled into a hallway in her apartment building and collapsed on the floor. A few minutes later the man returned one final time. He followed the trail of blood to the doorway where the woman lay bleeding on the tiled floor. And there, while the defenseless woman was barely conscious, in shock from pain and loss of blood, he cut off her clothes and sexually assaulted her. He then took \$49 in cash from her wallet and viciously stabbed her again, this time killing her.

The entire ordeal lasted over thirty minutes. At this point, finally, someone called the police. Officers arrived

within two minutes and quickly found the woman’s body in the hallway. She had been stabbed seventeen times. According to a news report, a canvass of the neighborhood turned up many witnesses. The police discovered up to thirty-eight people who supposedly had heard or observed some part of the fatal assault. *Only one witness called the police, but by the time the call came it was too late to save her.* Did they all hesitate out

“
Like the woman
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of fear? A lieutenant said, “[When people] are in their homes, near phones, why should they be afraid to call the police?” But the cold, cruel fact remains that reportedly dozens of people heard or saw something yet didn’t bother to check into it. Those in a position to prevent the tragedy remained silent as a woman was brutally mauled to death, and did nothing to intervene and save her life. Perhaps everyone thought someone else would help.¹

AN UNBELIEVABLE OUTRAGE

An officer later told the press, “If we had been called when he first attacked, the woman might not be dead now.”² If any one of the neighbors had simply called the police at the first sign of trouble, the victim may have survived. The first stab wounds may not have been fatal.

If thinking about all those silent witnesses makes you feel absolutely disgusted, that’s good; you ought to. When we see such a tragedy and don’t lift a finger to help, it shows we lack the basic human virtue of compassion. We become like wicked criminals ourselves. Just as we each have a moral obligation to save human life, as Christians we have an even greater responsibility to save people’s souls. Like the woman in this story, people all around us are in danger of losing their lives—for eternity. Death is relentlessly stalking them. We may wish we could turn away and not get involved, but God has other ideas: He has called us, each one of us, to rescue those who are perishing without Christ.

The woman’s neighbors may have thought that with other lights on, with residents at their windows, someone else would have called the police. Not one of them simply dialed 911 until after the poor woman was dead. God doesn’t accept the “someone else will do it” excuse; He expects us to save the dying, and promises to hold us responsible if we won’t.

Listen to the serious warning God gave to Ezekiel:

“When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.” (Ezekiel 3:18)

Ezekiel was given a very sobering charge, one that applies to all of us. Proverbs 24:11,12 says, “Deliver those who are

drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, ‘Surely we did not know this,’ does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?”

WHAT IS GOD’S WILL FOR MY LIFE?

During my years as a youth pastor, like clockwork as soon as junior year settled in, teens with college on the brain avalanched me with this question: “What is God’s will for my life?” Let me assure you, it’s far more than a matter of which school to go to, who you should marry, or the career you should choose. God’s will for your life is *much* greater: you were destined to know God and make Him known.³

God’s will for your life and mine can be found in Matthew 22, where Jesus gave us what are known as the “Great Commandments”:

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”

Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:35–40)

God’s will for each of us is to love Him with every aspect of our being and to love people passionately—as much as we love ourselves.

It’s been said, “Those eternally seeking the will of God are always passed up by those busy doing the will of God.” After you’ve sought God in prayer and received wise counsel,

the best way to discover the fine details of God's will for you is to get started doing the part you know to do right now. One critical aspect of God's will for our lives that He has made crystal clear is that we need to reach out to the perishing!

Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). I don't know about you, but I sure don't want to go to Hell. Tragically, that's exactly where people will end up if they die without having their sins forgiven in Christ. So if we love others like we love ourselves, we'll care about where they're headed—enough to actually do something about it.

THE THIRTY-NINTH WITNESS

Jesus' last words before He ascended to Heaven weren't, "Just hang tight. I'll see ya later!" Instead, His last words on earth were a command. The One we claim as our Lord said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Again, this isn't a suggestion for when we have nothing better to do. Jesus left us with an *order* to spread the good news, to advertise the truth of the gospel—that our sins can be forgiven and we can receive eternal life. Who wouldn't want to share such incredible news as that?

Imagine a world-renowned medical researcher has just had a serious heart attack. Knowing he has mere moments to live, he stretches out his trembling hand and gives you a paper with his recent discovery: the cure to cancer. With a fiery intensity in his eyes, he whispers, "Get this to the world!" and then breathes his last. That's a picture of the tremendous value of what God has entrusted to us and the urgency of the message.

In Christ's shed blood on the cross, we have the only cure to the fatal disease of sin that has infected all of humanity.

When Jesus told us to get the word out, He was sending us to save the world! If we don't share the gospel—the only hope for mankind—we are hiding the cure from the patient. We're cruel and selfish people. You see, *if you don't open your mouth to save the lost, you are another silent witness.*

IF NECESSARY, USE WORDS?

Ever heard the popular saying, “Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words”? This expression is often attributed to Francis of Assisi, but it not only misquotes him, it's flat-out wrong.

It is *always* necessary to use words when sharing the gospel message about Jesus. Check out this eye-opening passage:

“Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”
How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:13,14)

We need to open our mouths and verbally share the message, so people can hear and believe.

Pop quiz: You're relaxing in a lounge chair poolside and see a drowning child. Do you:

- A. Smile and wave
- B. Offer to buy him lunch
- C. Invite him to church
- D. Jump in and rescue him

Maybe you believe you're “being a witness” by living a good life. You may feel that your lifestyle will speak for you and attract others to ask what makes you so different, and *then* you'll have your open door to witness. Not to be insen-

sitive, but I have to ask: how well has that been working? How many people have asked you so far: five, twenty, fifty? Probably very few. Genuinely loving God—living a godly life—is so important, but your lifestyle alone won’t save people. God needs your tongue too. We can’t simply *hope* the lost connect the dots and ask us how to be saved from Hell. Why should they? They don’t even know they’re headed there. Instead, we need to have compassion and open our mouths. Don’t hide the cure in your pocket while people are dying; give it out to everyone you can. We need to obey Jesus and *share* the good news!

If you see a blind man walking toward the edge of a thousand-foot cliff, don’t simply smile and play some beautiful Christian music for him. Warn him about the drop! He will die if you don’t speak up. Nowhere in the entire Bible does it even suggest we’re supposed to be silent and hope the unsaved get interested enough to ask us about our faith. Some believers think 1 Peter 3:15 gives them an out, because it says to “always be ready to give a defense to everyone *who asks you* a reason for the hope that is in you.” But remember, Jesus sent His followers out into the world to preach the gospel to *everyone* (Mark 16:15). God’s Word makes it clear that we’re to be out engaging people in spiritual conversations—and that’s when we need to have answers for their questions.

Because we have compassion, we’re to warn people of their danger and be “pulling them out of the fire” (Jude 23).

Do you remember what the silence of all those witnesses did for the woman? Don’t be like them.

THE CONDEMNED MAN’S LAST WALK

In the late 1800s a condemned British criminal was approaching the last moments of his life. He was on his “death

walk” to the gallows where he would soon be hung. The prison minister, as he had done so many times before, walked alongside the condemned man reading aloud about the fires of Hell. The convict was shocked that a man who said he believed the Bible could so coolly and nonchalantly read about the terrors of Hell without a tear in his eye or even a tremble in his voice.

How can he believe there is an eternal fire that never consumes its victims and yet be so unmoved? the condemned man thought to himself. When he couldn’t take it anymore he snapped at the minister. “Sir,” he said, “if I believed what you and the church of God say you believe, even if England were covered with broken glass from coast to coast, I would walk over it, if need be, on hands and knees and think it worthwhile living, just to save one soul from an eternal hell like that!”⁴

May none of us ever take lightly the horrifying reality of Hell. And to help us, here’s a very sobering statistic to keep in mind: *150,000 people die every day*, and most of them enter eternity without the Savior. Very few people know the schedule for their date with death, like this man did, so we need to be busy rescuing people before it’s too late.

AN ENDLESS NIGHTMARE

Hell has always been the greatest motivation for me to witness. The thought of someone being tormented in Hell for eternity just makes me want to cry. It drives me to push aside my fears and get out and speak to people about God.

The Bible warns us, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). Paul said one of his primary motivations for witnessing was his awareness of the coming judgment: “For we must all appear before the judg-

ment seat of Christ... Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:10,11). Listen to the frightening words the Bible uses to describe Jesus’ return:

... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. (2 Thessalonians 1:7–9)

The Bible refers to the coming Day of Judgment as the “day of wrath” (Romans 2:5). It’s the day when the Son of God will sit on His throne as the just Judge of the universe and cast guilty sinners into the eternal dungeon of Hell. (If you don’t understand why He would do that, see “How can a loving God send good people to Hell?” in chapter 11.)

The Bible says Hell is a place of eternal torment reserved for those who despise God, who reject Jesus Christ and the forgiveness He’s paid for.

Jesus described Hell as a place of:

- Not just crying, but “weeping and wailing” (Matthew 8:12; 13:42)
- Gnashing of teeth, which people do in extreme agony (Matthew 13:50)
- Pitch black, “the blackness of darkness forever” (Matthew 25:30; Jude 1:13)
- Everlasting flames where the “fire is not quenched” (Matthew 25:41; Mark 9:48)
- Unending torment (Revelation 14:10,11)

Think of those sitting in prison who spend day and night in solitary confinement. How awful that must be. I imagine

they may have a better grasp of Hell than most of us do. Their life is spent in loneliness and emptiness, with nothing to occupy their time and no break in sight; and when they reflect on the vile crime that sent them there, they may feel intense shame and regret. But even then, those prisoners have only a mere hint of the torments of Hell.

For them there is always hope. Even with a life sentence, they will eventually, in maybe fifty years or so, find freedom in death. They will be liberated from those bars of steel to enter eternity. Those who have trusted Christ will be ushered into Heaven, forgiven of their sins; but those sent to Hell ... there are no words. They will have no pardon, no second chance. Their sentence in that eternal prison won't be a hundred years, or a million years; it will be all of forever! Think about that. It drives me to tears as I type this. Hell is a place of unspeakable horrors—a place that rewards the sins of men with eternal shame and torment.

Charles Spurgeon, a famous preacher of the 1800s, once said:

If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies; and if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay ... Let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.⁵

If we love God we will obey Him, and if we love our neighbors as ourselves, we will care enough about the lost to open our mouths. If we have compassion—which we should as Christ's followers—we will learn to overcome our fears. Yeah, we'll still be scared to talk about Jesus, we'll fear being rejected or looking like a freak, but because we care, our love will conquer our fears.

Won't you open your mouth and be a faithful witness?

Words of COMFORT 

When I read of that poor woman being stabbed so many times, and then being sexually assaulted and murdered, I was horrified to a point of tears. Human beings are capable of an empathy that is rarely seen in the animal kingdom. We are able to enter into the pains of others, because we are made in the image of God. But when sin entered humanity through Adam, it marred that image. There is something in all of us that is capable of seeing someone in need and yet shutting up our heart and refusing to help (1 John 3:17). God forbid that should ever happen in the life of any Christian.

I have often thought about how I would react if I was speaking to a crowd when somebody showed up with a gun and began shooting. Would I instinctively run and hide, or would I try to save people by running at the attacker to try to overcome and disarm him? Would I be more concerned about my own precious life, or would I be courageous and save others? I hope that I would have the courage to do what I know is the right thing. After commanding us to love one another, Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Thankfully, most of us will never find ourselves in that position where we might risk our life for others. However, we are surrounded by crowds who are being swallowed by death and damned in Hell. May we never shut up our heart and fail to do what we know we should. All it costs us is our comfort. Let’s make it a matter of urgent prayer—that we walk daily in the love of Christ, more concerned about others than we are about ourselves.

Study Guide

TALK IT OUT

1. How did you feel when you read about the silent witnesses?
2. Why do you think they didn't call the police? Are those excuses good enough?
3. Have you shared the gospel before? If so, briefly tell about the last person you shared with and how it went.
4. Why are many teens more concerned about things like which college they'll go to than the fact that millions are going to Hell?
5. True or false: You don't need to witness with your words; your lifestyle will do the job. Explain your answer.
6. Does thinking about the reality of Hell motivate you to witness? Why or why not? Is there something that would motivate you more?

THINK IT THROUGH

Break into small groups and come up with a "commercial" for witnessing. Get creative! Pretend witnessing is a hot new sports drink or a movie that's coming out this Friday. Go nuts—but give real reasons why to witness. In ten minutes each team will perform their commercial. The team with the best commercial wins bragging rights.

LOOK IT UP

Read the following Bible passage and then discuss its meaning:

2 Kings 7:3–16.

1. What drove the lepers to return to the city?

2. How might the lepers have felt if they never shared the good news and their people starved to death?
3. How could this story relate to witnessing?
4. Do you think they felt like Paul did in 1 Corinthians 9:16? Why or why not?

TAKE IT IN

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

MARK 16:15

LIVE IT OUT

Call two Christian teens from your church or school and tell them you’re doing this study on witnessing. Ask if they can help you with this week’s assignment by answering a few questions. Write down their answers, and we’ll share them in next week’s study.

1. How often do you share the gospel?
 - Teen 1:
 - Teen 2:
2. Do you verbally witness to strangers? If not, why not?
 - Teen 1:
 - Teen 2:
3. What’s the main reason you don’t share the gospel more often?
 - Teen 1:
 - Teen 2:
4. Would you like to come to the study on witnessing next week?
(Sell them on it!)