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INTRODUCTION

Our Lord himself, who is yet more our pattern, delivered the larger proportion of his sermons on the mountain's side, or by the seashore, or in the streets. Our Lord was to all intents and purposes an open-air preacher.

—CHARLES SPURGEON

Thank you for picking up this book. Whether you are experienced in sharing the gospel with individuals and now want to reach more people through preaching in the open air, or you're just getting started with evangelizing and want to dive into the deep end with open-air preaching as I did, your voice is greatly needed. To many, the practice of preaching to strangers seems archaic and outdated, and we rarely hear pastors preaching on the subject despite its mention throughout Scripture. Perhaps that's because they don't practice it themselves. Let's hope and pray that changes. Your example may help, so God bless you for your boldness.

Some have wondered whether open-air preaching is for every Christian. I would say yes and no. Yes, if you desperately want to reach the world with the gospel. No, if you are not that desperate. Mark 16:15 is commonly called “the Great Commission,” and it tells us to “go into all the world and preach the

gospel to every creature.” The word “preach” means to “herald” with a raised voice. Open-air preaching is as old as preaching itself. Throughout history God has used open-air preachers to bring the gospel to the multitudes. Not only did Jesus preach the gospel in the open air, but so did John the Baptist, Paul, Stephen, Peter, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, D. L. Moody, and many others throughout church history.

In fact, Charles Spurgeon, known as the Prince of Preachers, said, “No sort of defense is needed for preaching out-of-doors; but it would need very potent arguments to prove that a man had done his duty who has never preached beyond the walls of his meetinghouse.” John Wesley stated, “What marvel the devil does not love field-preaching! Neither do I: I love a commodious room, a soft cushion, a handsome pulpit. But where is my zeal if I do not trample all these underfoot to save one more soul?”

“We are not to preach merely to those who come to listen. We must carry the Gospel to where men do not desire it. We should consider it our business to be generously impertinent—thrusting the Gospel into men’s way—whether they will hear or whether they will not.” —CHARLES SPURGEON

When I witness one-to-one, I am excited that one person is listening to the words of everlasting life. In a good open air, I can witness one-to-two hundred. How much better it is to offer the cure to death and Hell to two hundred than one dying sinner. Whitefield spoke in the open air to crowds of up to twenty

thousand! I wish every Christian could say with the apostles, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20), to a point where they would open-air preach to those unaware that they are on their way to Hell.

Perhaps the thought of open-air preaching is new to you. You can’t picture yourself standing up among strangers and preaching the gospel to them. But if we are serious about reaching this world, let us emulate Jesus and the apostles and preach where sinners gather. *In thirty minutes, a good open-air preacher can reach more unsaved people than the average church does in a year.* Thank God the disciples didn’t stay in the upper room. They didn’t carpet the building, pad the pews, then put a notice on the front door stating “Tonight: Gospel outreach service, 7 p.m. All welcome.” They went out and preached in the open air.

The gospel is for the world, not the church. That’s why Jesus said, “Go . . .,” but like King Og, we seem to have it backwards. We take sinners to meetings rather than meetings to sinners. The church prefers to fish on dry land rather than get its feet wet. But there is no higher calling than to follow in the footsteps of the Savior and preach in the open air.

ARE YOU QUALIFIED?

Perhaps you lack the courage to do such a thing. Congratulations; you have just qualified yourself for the job. If you consider yourself a “nobody” with nothing to offer God, you are His material. When you submit yourself to Him for His use, He promises to do “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20).

God in His wisdom has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the mighty and the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.

Now all you need is a compassion that will swallow your fear, and a conscience that will give you no rest until you break the sound barrier. I pray that, through this book, God will give you both.

You will notice numerous links throughout this book to videos that you can watch online. This is because we tend to remember what we see more than what we simply read. It is far more instructive and encouraging to actually see and hear open-air preaching than to just read about it. You will see the power of God's Law to stop the sinner's mouth, how a heckler can be used to draw a crowd, and many other principles that will help you not only to grow in Christ but to conquer your fears.



CHAPTER 1

A LITTLE PERSONAL HISTORY

I believe I never was more acceptable to my Master than when I was standing to teach those hearers in the open fields . . . I now preach to ten times more people than I would if I had been confined to the churches.

—GEORGE WHITEFIELD

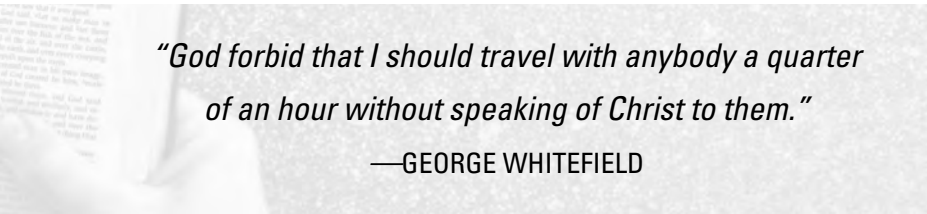
The year was 1974. I was riding the bus to my shop, Leather-gear, where I manufactured dressy made-to-order leather and suede jackets. The store was about half a mile from the center of my home city of Christchurch, New Zealand, which was built around an Anglican cathedral in The Square.

For two years, I had rented a building close to our home in the suburbs, six miles from The Square. It was a combined leather gear and surf shop. One day a stranger boldly walked into the store saying that he had purchased the property and wanted me out in a month. It was ironic because I had been a

Christian for a month or so and had just given my business to the Lord. I wanted everything to be in His hands.

A month later, I was joyfully making jackets from home rent-free, but it wasn't long before the city said I couldn't use a commercial sewing machine in a residential area. Very strangely, I couldn't find anywhere near our home where I could set up a business. Every door I knocked on closed in my face. I was forced to find a building closer to the heart of the city of 350,000 souls.

As I sat on the bus heading into town, I looked at those who were seated around me. I had found everlasting life, and I knew that if these people died in their sins, they would go to Hell. But it wasn't just that terrible fact that bothered me. I was aware that each of them was tormented by the dread of death, something I had before I was saved (see Hebrews 2:14,15). It was an overwhelming feeling of hopeless horror—that this thing called “death” was waiting to swallow me.

A quote by George Whitefield is presented on a piece of paper with a slightly textured, aged appearance. The text is centered and reads: *“God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them.”*

“God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them.”

—GEORGE WHITEFIELD

Oh, how utterly thankful I was that God had saved me from death: “For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling” (Psalm 116:8). Words can't begin to express the gratitude I had for the hope of the gospel; and these poor souls, as far as I knew, were unsaved . . . waiting to die. The thought horrified me. If I stood up and preached to them, the bus would stop and I would be tossed out; so I whispered, “If only there was some place I could preach to people. If only . . .”

Two weeks later (through a series of strange circumstances), the city legalized public speaking in The Square. Oh, dear. It seemed that God had answered my prayer.

MY FIRST OPEN AIR

So it was that I found myself standing in front of a small crowd in The Square, waiting to preach the gospel to thirty to forty people sitting on the steps eating lunch, with a few stragglers leaning against a wall. To say I was nervous would be the understatement of eternity. Seven years earlier, I had determined never, ever to speak in public. Ever. My high school teacher had required the class to give speeches, and I had dried up in the middle of my speech about surfing, had to sit down, and was humiliated in front of my friends. Yet here I was, about to open my terrified mouth in front of strangers who weren't going to like what I was about to say.

I felt very nervous, but I knew I had to do it. Just as I was about to step forward, a Christian came alongside me not knowing what I was planning to do. I can't remember his exact words, but it was something like, "Look at that bunch of losers. Hardly worth preaching the gospel to them," then he walked off. I couldn't believe my ears. It was perfect timing. Too perfect. I realized it was a subtle satanic message to discourage me, so I stepped forward and preached anyway. I have no memory of how I began or even how the crowd reacted, but after I finished I knew it wasn't over. I knew I had to come back and do it again and again.

That was around March 1974, and I thank God that I opened my mouth that day. It was the first of over three thousand times

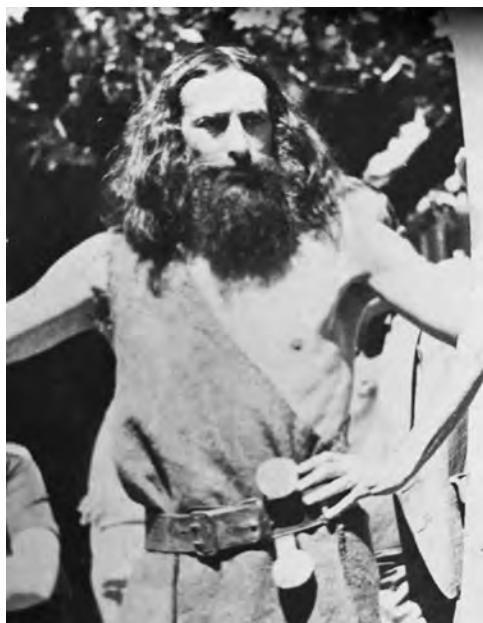
that I would speak to the crowds in “Speaker’s Corner” in The Square.

I certainly wasn’t the only speaker who took advantage of the audience gathered there. Over the fourteen years in which I preached in Christchurch, I befriended a colorful character known as “the Wizard,” who also regularly spoke to the lunchtime crowds. He was intelligent, friendly, kind, and very anti-Christian. However, he liked me despite the fact that I was a “disgusting, low-down, born-again,” while he was a High-Church Anglican. I preached for the first lunch hour and he preached for the second.



This is a typical crowd that would gather to listen to the Wizard (my friendly enemy). At times he would kindly allow me to climb his ladder and preach to his huge crowds.

His crowds were always larger than mine, but because of our friendship, there were times when he let me climb up on his ladder and speak to his crowd while he stood beside me. It was amazing.



*Here is Jack (the Wizard) in his John the Baptist outfit.
He would, with tongue-in-check, ask his crowd who looked
more like Jesus, him or me?*

On January 10, 1989, Sue and I left our beloved city and families and left everything we knew to be home. I had been invited to take my family to the United States, specifically to bring a teaching called “Hell’s Best Kept Secret” to the church of America. For a video clip of the Wizard on the day I left New Zealand, go to LivingWaters.com/WOTS and watch “Speaker’s Corner 1989.”

CHANGING VENUES

Following our move to Los Angeles, I made sure that I continued open-air preaching. For a year I traveled to the famed MacArthur Park and preached to addicts.

Before we arrived in the United States, I was absolutely sure that God wanted me to go to MacArthur Park. I had no idea that it had the dubious reputation of having the highest crime rate in the Los Angeles area. I remember preaching with my back to a tree because someone warned me that if I didn't, I would probably be stabbed. I didn't doubt it. The place was a haven for drug abuse.

I ended up not only preaching, but feeding the hungry and bathing wounds. The people were so hungry they would fight over the sandwiches I gave out and I had to warn them not to rush at me to get food. One time I had them line up and instructed them to take just one sandwich each. I couldn't believe my eyes when, just after telling them to take only one, I could see a man with a sandwich in one hand reaching out for another! I was indignant and said, "What's that in your hand?!" He said, "A knife," to which I replied, "Here, have another sandwich." It was a very memorable place.¹

After preaching weekly at MacArthur Park for a year, there was a big police bust and my "congregation" ended up either in prison or scattered throughout Los Angeles. I went on a search for them and ended up on Fourth Street in downtown Los Angeles, where the homeless slept on the sidewalk by the hundreds if not thousands. I would take a team to preach the gospel and then give out food. We did that many times until the Los Angeles riots occurred in the area where I took my team and I decided it was too dangerous to continue going there.

That's when I started taking a team to the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica, a popular shopping and dining area filled with endless tourists and colorful characters.

One Friday night Arnold Schwarzenegger and his wife walked past. I decided that wise men follow stars, so I followed him and noticed that they walked into one of the well-known Gap stores.

"The great benefit of open-air preaching is that we get so many newcomers to hear the gospel who otherwise would never hear it." —CHARLES SPURGEON

I entered through another door and waited for them to approach me. So there I was, standing in the gap for Arnold Schwarzenegger. As he approached I became starstruck and didn't greet them but instead just held out a tract. He put out his hand and said a loud, "No!" and walked on. I was annoyed with myself for not at least having the courtesy of telling him how great his movies were (even though I had never seen one) before offering him a tract. Fortunately, a few minutes later a young member of my team got to witness to him and his wife for about ten minutes. The next week, three times as many church members wanted to come with me to Santa Monica.

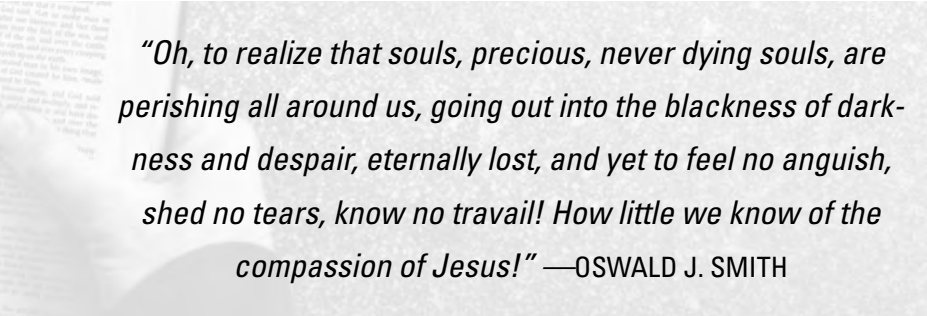
I preached there every Friday night for three and a half years until being forced to move on by a professing Christian. He would show up with a bull horn and drown me out with abuse. I felt it was time for a change. For a video clip of preaching at Santa Monica during that time, go to LivingWaters.com/WOTS and watch "Santa Monica July 2001."

I then began frequenting the local courts in our home city of Bellflower and witnessing one to one with people who were

waiting to see the judge. One day I arrived earlier than normal and noticed that fifty to sixty people were lined up outside waiting to get in to the courts. So I made up my mind that I was going to preach to them. I did—and they listened (they were a captive audience).

So almost daily for the next two and a half years, “E.Z.” (my son-in-law) and I and a few other members of our staff began open-air preaching at the local courts, to people from all walks of life, then handing out gospel tracts and books to the crowd. One day a judge who didn’t like what we were doing, with a stroke of his pen, decreed the area where we stood to preach to be the private property of the court rather than public property. He then made it against the law for us to preach there.

To hear recordings of open-air preaching at the courts, go to LivingWaters.com/springboards and select the audio files.



“Oh, to realize that souls, precious, never dying souls, are perishing all around us, going out into the blackness of darkness and despair, eternally lost, and yet to feel no anguish, shed no tears, know no travail! How little we know of the compassion of Jesus!” —OSWALD J. SMITH

Stuart Scott and I began traveling each Saturday to Huntington Beach and preaching to the crowds there—something we have done weekly since 2006.

Also, during those years, I took teams to prestigious universities around the country (including Yale, USC, UCLA, and Berkeley) and open-air preached to students, shining the light

of the gospel in areas darkened by the dogma of evolutionary humanism. We've been commanded to "go into all the world and preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15), so we also went to Europe and preached open air in thirteen European countries in thirteen days and filmed thirteen episodes for our TV program, *Way of the Master*.²



Here is part of a crowd at UCLA in 2011.

They stayed for two hours and listened to the gospel.

Over the decades I've been a Christian, I've had the privilege of preaching the gospel in the open air thousands of times, to small handfuls or several hundreds, to young and old, eager listeners and angry crowds, from beaches to university campuses, by myself and with a team, across the country and around the

world. I've learned a lot about what to do—and what not to do—to effectively share the gospel in the open air. To save you some of the trial and error, I'd like to share some valuable lessons that I've learned through those experiences. I hope this information will help to shorten your learning curve and help you become even more effective in reaching the lost.