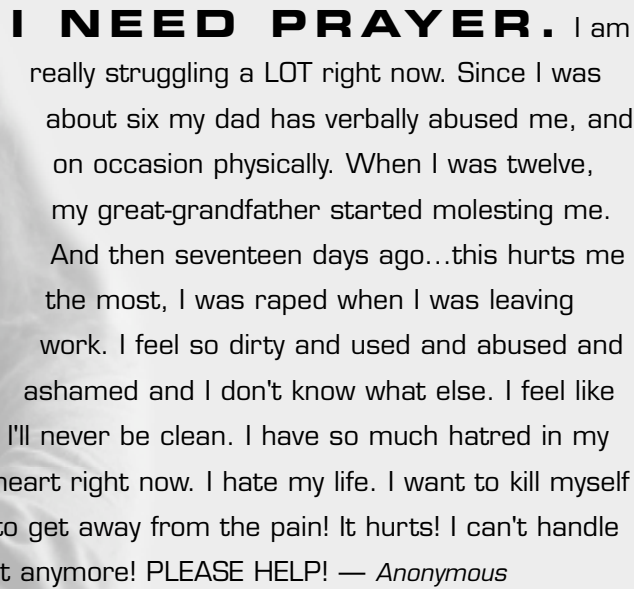


C H A P T E R O N E

the car's on fire

Chances are you didn't wake up this morning and decide, "Today, I'll be a hero." Opportunities for acts of heroism rarely show up on weekly planners or "To Do" lists. Instead, they intrude into everyday life, demanding split-second choices at great personal risk. At least that's the way it happened for my brother Ralph. One Sunday morning in the summer of 1998, Ralph steered his car out of the congested, post-service church parking lot. In the car directly ahead of him were two teenage girls. About a mile down the road, the girls halted their vehicle at a four-way stop, then proceeded carefully into the intersection as Ralph, his own car packed full with his wife and five small children, waited his turn to follow.

Without warning, a pickup truck sped through the intersection and slammed broadside into the car containing the two teenage girls. Ralph watched in disbelief as the driver, 17-year-old Ashley, was thrown from the car and killed instantly. His disbelief turned to horror as the car burst into flames, trapping the unconscious 14-year-old



I NEED PRAYER. I am really struggling a LOT right now. Since I was about six my dad has verbally abused me, and on occasion physically. When I was twelve, my great-grandfather started molesting me. And then seventeen days ago...this hurts me the most, I was raped when I was leaving work. I feel so dirty and used and abused and ashamed and I don't know what else. I feel like I'll never be clean. I have so much hatred in my heart right now. I hate my life. I want to kill myself to get away from the pain! It hurts! I can't handle it anymore! PLEASE HELP! — *Anonymous*

Amy inside. Ralph was suddenly out of his car and racing toward the burning vehicle. Somehow he managed to pry open the car door and, grabbing the belt loops of the limp and helpless teenager, free Amy from the inferno. Soon after Ralph pulled Amy to safety, paramedics whisked her away to the hospital where she fully recovered.

Suddenly Ralph was the town hero. He had saved a girl's life! Congratulations began pouring in from all over town, including the mayor's office. The local paper featured an article about Ralph's selfless act. When I discovered what had happened, I called Ralph to express my amazement at his courage. I tried to imagine what had inspired this father of five to risk everything—his personal safety, his family, his life—for a girl he barely knew.

Finally I asked him the question that was eating at me: "What were you thinking? I mean, what was going through your mind as you approached that burning car?"

"You know, Ron," Ralph replied, "I didn't do anything that anyone else in my position wouldn't have done. I don't know how I did it. All

I know is that *when the car is on fire, you do whatever you have to do to get the girl out!*"

People, the car is on fire and the youth of America are trapped inside. Suicide, abortion, alcohol, drug abuse, and violence are fiery flames licking at the wreckage of many young lives. The stakes are staggering—we have in America today 33 million teenagers, the largest group of teens since World War II.¹ This generation of youth has the potential to impact our nation—economically, politically, spiritually—with every bit as much force as the baby boomers have. These young people are our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, grandsons and granddaughters, nieces and nephews. They are the future of America. We've got to get them out—whatever it takes—we've got to get them out.

NATION AT A CROSSROADS

Our nation has the proud heritage of being founded on Christian principles; many of our founding fathers were godly men. For two centuries we have enjoyed a society that—while not thoroughly Christian—is based on many of the moral imperatives from Scripture. But as our population has fallen from core evangelical, Bible-based beliefs, so has our society in our desire to be a tolerant, inclusive society. There is no longer a potent majority that speaks out when traditional biblical values are violated. This fact alone bears serious reflection, but I fear our present reality is much worse.

It is well documented that the percentage of Bible-based believers has steadily decreased since the builder generation, as reflected

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in the following table from the book *The Bridger Generation* by Thom S. Rainer:²

- *Builders (born 1927-1945): 65% Bible-based believers*
- *Boomers (born 1946-1964): 35% Bible-based believers*
- *Busters (born 1965-1983): 16% Bible-based believers*
- *Bridgers (or Millennials, born 1984 or later): 4% Bible-based believers*

Think about what this means. While many Americans today may call themselves “Christians,” only four percent of Millennials affirm themselves as church-attending, Bible-believing Christians. If that statistic doesn’t alarm you, it should. It should alarm us all. Why? For the answer, we can look at the legacy left by previous generations in today’s culture.

DECLINE OF CHRISTIAN CULTURE

For as long as many of us can remember, we have known that when the Boomers hit a certain age, their sheer numbers would affect all of American society more than any other generation in modern times. Today’s corporate, political, and religious leaders are the Baby Boomers. With only 35 percent firmly believing in Scripture, they have shaped our culture with the following results:

- *Morally corrupt films and television programs*
- *An increasingly perverted music industry*
- *The pornographic invasion of the Internet*
- *Civil initiatives promoting gay marriage*
- *Battles to remove the Ten Commandments from public buildings, and fights to take “under God” out of our Pledge of Allegiance*

If these are the struggles we face now, with 35 percent of the largest generation of Americans affirming a belief in Scripture, can you imagine what America will be like when today's teens become the next generation to dominate the population, with only 4 percent currently claiming to be Bible-believing Christians?

Seventy-one million millennials (33 million now in their teens) hold our future in their hands. Our national destiny is linked to this new generation. Try to imagine a society that mocks the fact that “under God” was *ever even* in our Pledge of Allegiance. Try to imagine the motto “In God we trust” taken off our money. Imagine all references to Christ and His cross removed from all emblems and city logos. Try to imagine a world where a pastor can go to jail for saying homosexuality is wrong. Current news stories confirm that these unfortunate events are already happening here and in other nations around the world. If we think Christians are persecuted and marginalized now in the U.S., imagine being the laughingstock of society! Is this the price we must pay for neglecting to build a solid Biblical framework into the hearts of our children and our children's children?

WHO WILL SAVE AMERICA'S YOUTH?

History is rich with examples of first-generation believers who paid a high price for their faith. That price was paid so future generations could thrive in a society with religious freedom. To those early believers, America was a “city on a hill,” a nation set aside for God's purposes—a country established for good and fruitfully blessed so that we might take God's message to the ends of the earth.

I'M DROWNING

in my sea of blood, hate, and deception. I'm
drowning ... dying. Does anybody care? — *Beth*

decades may pass before any other generation has the opportunity to effect change of this magnitude.

Whatever direction this new generation takes, so it will take the nation. We need not be left only to imagine the America of tomorrow. It is within our power, as Christian leaders, parents, and concerned adults, to shape the next generation of Americans. Together we can ensure that our children and our grandchildren grow up in a society fortified by biblical principles and a strong moral code. It is the heritage our forefathers fought and died to secure for us. Can we do less than fight for the same values for the next generation?

For over 18 years, I've regularly crisscrossed our country speaking to millions of representatives of this future generation. I am compelled to do so because of how Jesus radically saved and changed me when I was a 16-year-old trapped in drug abuse and a broken home. Since then, He has given me the opportunity to share with millions of hurting teens how He alone has the power to heal their shattered lives. I have seen the worst of the worst as I travel and conduct Acquire the Fire conferences weekend after weekend—and I know that no one is beyond the reach of God's loving hand. But never before have I felt so compelled to sound an alarm, a call to take up arms in the battle of the new millennium.

This is our moment in history. Decades may pass before any other generation has the opportunity to effect change of this magnitude. The car is on fire. We see it burning and we know that there is someone trapped inside. *This crisis demands our response.* We've got to leave the comfort of our cars—our own families, churches, and

communities—and take a risk. Will we prove we are ready for the challenge of our day? Will history condemn our apathy and self-indulgence and grieve that our moment passed without our resolute commitment to make a difference?

NOW IS THE TIME

A holy urgency burns in my soul to capture the heart of this generation NOW while teens are still open to the life-changing message of the Gospel of Christ. This is what keeps me awake at night. Today is our moment of greatest opportunity. We must capture their hearts while they are young. We have a short window of 5 to 7 years before most of them will be into their 20s and set the pace for American culture.

Our nation is truly at a crossroad. What we do in the next 5 years could affect the next 50 to 100 years of American history. Every year in America, 4.5 million teenagers turn 20 years old. Research shows that once a child reaches that milestone, the odds of reaching that individual for Christ are nearly 10 to 1. In fact, the Barna Research Group has gathered data that leads them to conclude that “what you believe by the time you are 13 is what you will die believing.”³

Something is happening right in front of the faces of Christians here in America that demands our attention. It is not my intention to overwhelm you with data (although the statistics will alarm you) because this book is not about data; it is about our children. I want to give you just enough facts to help you get a clear picture of the situation so that you can begin to see what we can do as a force for God to rescue our dying teens.

These words of mine cannot serve as just another news flash. This book cannot be just another book that makes us concerned without provoking our commitment and sacrifice. This is not a time for “business as usual” in our outreach to teens. If we do not act now, in twenty years we will all look back and say, “If we had only known.

If we had only done something.”

This is our moment, our defining moment. What we do now in this season will determine the next hundred years of American history. The actions we take now will determine whether or not America continues on her current path toward becoming a post-Christian nation or returns to her legacy as a nation under God. In the pages that follow, I intend to help you hear the anguished cries of millions of teens, to stir your hearts to action, and to present a plan for engaging in the battle for this generation.

In the next chapter I'll get even more specific about how we can know the enemy confronting us. For we cannot go back and pretend these acts of terror never happened. We can't go along with business as usual. And surely we will not allow the enemies of our offspring to quietly plot their destruction solely by our inaction. It's way past time to wake up.