



Chapter 1

REACHING THE OLD ME

I watched the man approach our tent. I'd seen that walk before. The one that switches from hope to uncertainty with each step. Looking tired and unsure, he stopped a few feet away and surveyed his surroundings. I could tell he wanted to come in, but something held him back.

I stepped outside of my ministry tent, into the heat, with a bottle of water in my hand. "Thirsty?" I said, over the sound of a car zipping past us standing on the infield at the Daytona International Speedway®. He looked in my direction, still not sure what to do next. He ran a dirty hand through his unwashed hair and said, "Sure is hot out here today; unusual for this time of year."

"Yeah, it is." I handed him the bottle of water and this time

he took it. “Shouldn’t be this hot in February. Not much we can do about it, though. It is what it is.” He twisted off the cap and took a sip.

“So what brings you my way?”

He looked around before answering, like he was unsure if he should tell me. “I’ve been camping with a buddy of mine.” He nodded in the direction of the campground. “We’ve been drinking and doing drugs for the last two days. He’s passed out right now; I needed to get away.” I nodded while he continued. “I’m tired of being hung over and strung out. I’m sick of it. The booze. The drugs. The women. All of it. So I decided to take a walk and here I am.” He dragged the toe of his boot through the dirt.

“Well, I’m glad you stopped by. You’re welcome to come inside if you want. This heat is a bit much,” I said as another car roared past us, drowning out my last few words.

His eyes widened. “Did you say you’re the heat?”

“No,” I said, chuckling and laying a hand on his shoulder. “I’m not the heat. It’s hot out here. Let’s go inside and chat.”

He eyed the banner across the top of our tent. “Lets Go Ministry—what the hell are you guys doing here?”

“We’re here to share God’s love with everyone that we can.”

He nodded, but didn’t take a step toward the tent. “I’ve heard about your Jesus, but I’m not sure what to make of Him.” This time the man took a long drink, almost finishing the bottle. “I’ve done so many things and screwed my life up so bad that I doubt

He gives a crap about me.”

“Oh, I’m not so sure about that,” I said. “You have no idea what I’ve done in my life.”

He scoffed. “You? You look like you’ve been in church all your life and have never been in trouble.”

“That’s the furthest thing from the truth.”

“Sure. Look at you. How could you ever understand what I’ve been through? You’re all cleaned up with a world class smile. Nice clothes and shoes.”

I gave him a quick once over before answering, not to judge, but to understand why he made the comment about my clothes and being clean. I could see why the nice clothes and shoes stood out to this guy, but I wasn’t dressed much differently than him. We both wore jeans, although his were covered with patches of grease and dirt. We both wore T-shirts; his promoted a popular motorcycle brand and mine was plain white. He wore a beat up pair of cowboy boots and I wore somewhat new sneakers.

“Do you really think God cares about your clothes or is intimidated by the bad things you’ve done? I was sitting in a jail cell strung out on meth when He reached out to me.”

He gave me a look—a suspicious, bloodshot squint with lips pursed—that I’d seen numerous times over the years since giving up drugs and alcohol for a life dedicated to Jesus Christ. I probably gave that same look to people back in the day when I was bound by my addictions. Incredulously, he said, “Come on, you? You can’t possibly know what it’s like to be hooked on drugs, alcohol, or both.”

“Why don’t we step inside and I’ll share my story with you. I bet you’ll be surprised.”

He looked at his empty water bottle and agreed. We stepped under the cover and he asked for more water. I reached into the cooler, pulled another bottle from the ice, and handed it to him. When he finished chugging that one down, I motioned to a pair of metal chairs off to the side, away from everyone else. He nodded and followed me.

Before we reached the seats, he asked, “You really used to do meth?”

“Meth, cocaine, pills, alcohol—anything I could get my hands on,” I said, taking the seat on the left so I could see the entrance. He flipped the other chair around and leaned on the back.

“I just don’t picture you being an addict.”

“Well,” I said, putting my elbows on my knees, “Let me tell you my story and you can decide for yourself.”