



The inspiring true story of Everett Swanson. Swanson's heart broke when he stumbled upon starving orphans. He faced the question, "What are you going to do?" His answer led to the organization known today as Compassion International. Everyone—young and old—should know this amazing story of faith, courage, and compassion.

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What Are You Going to Do? uses representative dialogue, without quotation marks, to indicate the authors’ creative license in setting historical scenes that are well sourced from historical events. This dialogue was approved for contextual accuracy by Swanson family members and Compassion International. Some names were also changed for legal and privacy purposes.

Though Koreans traditionally give their family name first, followed by given name, many English-speaking Koreans recognize the Western format, which we have adopted here in consultation with our Korean ministry partners.



Fall 1952

Seoul, South Korea

“If it is distant from your eyes,
it also becomes distant from your mind and heart.”

—*Korean Proverb*

REV. EVERETT F. SWANSON cannot escape the devastation. If he covers his ears, the concussion of mortar shells still buffets his chest. If he covers his eyes, the smell of death in wooden carts still fills his nostrils. He doesn't even think to cover his mouth, because he has no words to describe the horror all around.

Lord, have mercy.

Everett finishes a silent prayer and continues his walk between the bombed and bullet-scarred buildings of Seoul. Though a brisk morning wind sweeps down from the mountains, at least the sun is out. For this, he is thankful, and he tucks his coat under his arm.

It is his second trip to South Korea, this time by invitation of Chaplain Hyung-do Kim, a lanky fellow, chief chaplain at the Ministry of National Defense. Everett has preached to thousands of Korean officers in training, prayed with amputees in army hospitals, and surveyed the front lines where soldiers pace beside barbed wire.

Such a rugged, bountiful country.

And now the Korean War is tearing it apart.

Everett combs back thinning black hair and waits on a corner in the downtown district as a convoy rumbles past. The trucks stir up dust and diesel fumes, forcing him to wipe at his glasses.

Everywhere he looks, he sees a situation more desperate than a year ago. One of Korea's oldest names, *Chosŏn*, can be translated as "morning calm," yet its long history is one of conflict. Envied for its teeming rivers, fertile rice paddies, and strategic location, it is currently in a tug-of-war between America, China, and Russia. Refugees are pouring in from the north. Not so long ago, they experienced mighty revival, and now their cities have been leveled by US napalm and bombs. They come here with nothing but the clothes on their backs. The elderly hobble among them. Rich and poor, it doesn't matter, they live in shanties along the river.

At the street corner, Everett feels a sudden tug at his elbow. Before he can register what is happening, his coat is pried loose from under his arm. He turns and spots a Korean boy darting away.

Oh no, you don't!

Everett is nearly thirty-nine, not as light on his feet as he used to be, but still strong from his farm-boy roots. He has baled hay, mucked stalls, and filled pig troughs with slop. He's not about to let some youth get away with petty theft. By the time he takes off in pursuit, the kid is a half-block ahead, weaving between young ladies in black skirts and an older gentleman in a traditional horsehair hat. The traffic cop in the intersection pays no mind, stiffly pointing vehicles this way and that.

Everett's feet pound the dirt. He will catch this rascal.

The kid bumps into a street vendor, nearly trips, then keeps going. The vendor shouts at him. These beggar boys, as they are called, are a regular nuisance, parading defiantly in their tattered cotton pants while looking for opportunities to pester and steal.

Why not just ask for the coat? Everett might've handed it to him.

No, this thievery cannot be allowed. This ruffian can't grow up believing this is the answer. Such tactics won't win him any friends and will only make life harder in the long run. These are lessons Everett teaches his own children back home.

He pumps his arms faster. He is gaining on the beggar boy.

The kid races around a corner.

Everett makes a hard turn, regains his footing, and picks up speed. He can almost reach the boy's bony shoulder. Another three or four steps and the culprit will be in his grasp.

At the last second, the boy veers into an alleyway.

Everett shoots on by, skids to a halt, then backtracks. The alley is narrow, dark, and smelly. There is no sign of the thief. There's also no outlet. The dirty-faced urchin must be hiding here, probably only feet away.

Give me back my coat, Everett calls out, and I won't turn you in.
Silence.

Letting his eyes adjust, he hovers at the mouth of the alley. He is a pastor. All he had hoped for this morning was to enjoy a walk before praying with wounded, downtrodden soldiers. That is his job. He doesn't have time for beggar-boy games.

He spots his coat in the shadows, wadded atop a heap of garbage. As he snatches at it, the pile of rags comes alive. Startled, he takes a step back, then notices a dozen faces peering up at him, orphans with almond-shaped eyes over sniffing button noses.

Everett's heart seizes in his chest and his indignation melts away.

How long have they been here? When was their last meal?

He moves forward, arms extended in concern. These kids are so young. Having lost their fathers or mothers, they are survivors. They shy away from him. He knows on a deep level this isn't right.

Everett believes communism must be defeated, but these children shouldn't be forced to pay the price. Already, South Koreans have been cut off from relatives in the northern provinces, and North Koreans will view America as an enemy for decades to come. Now these little ones have been stripped of everything. They are so much more than beggar boys and girls. They are created in God's image.

Overwhelmed with compassion, Everett wants to draw them into an embrace. Perhaps he should pray with them. Have they ever heard the name of Jesus?

Their unblinking eyes stare into his.

Lord, what am I thinking?

Sure, Everett is a pastor, but these kids need practical help. They are so gaunt, their trousers held up with frayed, knotted ropes. Their limbs are shivering, their teeth chattering. If his own sons and daughter were hungry, he wouldn't just rattle off a quick prayer and hand them a Bible lesson, would he? Has he become that callous?

Wait here, Everett tells the huddled children, hoping they understand.

Leaving his coat behind, he hurries to a shop on the main thoroughfare and buys bowls of steaming soup. Trying not to spill, he delivers them back to the alleyway and sets them into outstretched hands.

What now? Where can he take these boys and girls?

Everett knows of US Army units who have "adopted" local orphans, providing them with food, clothing, and toys. While American soldiers have shocked many Koreans with their swearing, drinking, and gambling, they have also won some over with their generosity. What will happen, though, when the troops are shipped home?

He isn't sure what to do.

As he wanders back to his lodgings, he notices other kids in the streets. They lurk between buildings, under horse carts. Many carry tin pails and beg for food. Some bear the scars of napalm. Everett, while documenting homeless families along the river and women washing garments in the icy shallows, has somehow failed to notice the sheer number of these orphans. There must be thousands, even tens of thousands, here in Seoul alone.

Night falls, but Everett can barely sleep.

Will the Land of the Morning Calm ever be calm again?

* * *

The next morning, temperatures plummet. It is deathly cold. Everett sees his own breath as he steps outside, and the chill burrows into his bones. Ignoring his discomfort, he returns to the alley with food and hot tea.

As he draws near, a South Korean army truck pulls in front of him and squeals to a stop. Soldiers hop down and poke at a heap of rags. When nothing moves, they scoop up the pile and toss it into the back of the vehicle. They pull up to the next alley and repeat the process. This time, Everett's attention is drawn to a thin, lifeless arm jutting from the rags. Children have frozen to death overnight.

Dear God, no!

Everett vows then and there to do something. His options are limited, though, and he has only two days before his return to the States. He returns to the alley, and also shares his concerns with local aid workers, but he feels helpless.

On the date of Everett's departure, a fellow minister of the gospel, a Korean pastor, stops him at the airport. The man looks him straight in the eye and issues a challenge: "Mr. Swanson, you have seen these tremendous needs and opportunities. You have seen all these children. So tell me . . . What are you going to do?"

Suddenly, this is the most pressing question in the world.

Everett drops into his window seat on Pan Am Airlines and that question churns through his head. As the propellers begin to turn—*throppity-throppity*—he reminds himself he is no position to do anything. He has no funds. No backing. Who is he but a poor preacher with a family of his own to feed?

The plane accelerates down the runway, climbs into the sky, then levels out for its journey across the Pacific. With each *throppp-throppp-throppp* of the propellers, those six little words spin again through Everett's thoughts:

What are you going to do?

Throppp-throppp-throppp . . .

What are you going to do?

For years the people of Korea have had their hearts broken by hardship and tragedy, and now his own heart is breaking too.

What are you going to do?

Chapter 1

A NOBODY

In the bitter winter of 1913, the American Midwest braced for yet another storm. Dubbed the White Hurricane, the late-November weather system wreaked havoc across the Great Lakes, capsized vessels in 80 mph winds, and knocked out vital lines of communication. Waves battered and obliterated a Chicago seawall along the shores of Lake Michigan.

Sixty miles due west stood the township of Sycamore, Illinois. The residents didn't yet have home radios or TVs, and in the weeks following, they relied on the *Chicago Tribune* or local *Daily Chronicle* for updates as they handled the damage with stoic resolve.

On December 13, Emil Swanson paced his farmhouse floor with thumbs hooked into his suspenders. Though he knew he still had fences to mend, his mind was on more pressing matters.

His wife was in labor. It had been hours now. Groans carried through the walls from the other room and candlelight flickered weakly beneath the door.

Dear God, how much longer? Is everything all right?

Emil loved his wife dearly. He had immigrated from Sweden at age fifteen, learned English at a nearby schoolhouse, then married Emma Johnson, a fellow Swede. After losing their first child in infancy, Emma

had birthed three healthy sons. This morning, their boys had wanted to know if they'd be getting another brother this time, or a baby sister, and Emil couldn't provide an answer. God alone knew the details of this child knit together in the womb.

A cry pierced the air, loud enough to stop Emil's pacing. It rose in pitch, then fell away. Running a hand over his head, he breathed his wife's name and waited.

At last, he heard an infant's wail.

Once allowed into the room, Emil found Emma upright in bed and sporting a weary grin. The swaddled form at her bosom had ten tiny fingers and a head of black hair. Emil searched his wife's eyes for the answer to a nine-month mystery.

A boy, she told him. Meet Everett Francis Swanson.

He beamed. *Oh, thank You, Lord. You are good!*

Early in marriage, the Swansons had decided against a life in Chicago. They wanted to raise a family away from big-city temptations, focused instead on integrity and hard work. Emil knew he would still have to get up early tomorrow to milk the cows and address the storm damage. This was how things worked in the Swanson household, and their newborn would help with the chores as soon as he could walk.

He was a nobody. A regular farm boy. An immigrant's son.

He had none of the Rockefellers' fame or wealth, none of the Vanderbilts' earthly prestige. Why, he'd be lucky if he fit into his brothers' hand-me-downs.

No one could have guessed he would impact millions of lives around the world.

While even Emil and Emma couldn't foresee where their fourth son's life would take him, they did believe God had a divine plan for the boy. Following Proverbs 22:6, they dedicated him to the Lord as they had with each of their kids and agreed to "train up a child in the way he should go."

* * *

Everett was six months old when the assassination of a duke in eastern Europe triggered World War I. Along the Western Front, pimple-faced soldiers rolled out razor wire and dug trenches to hold back the Germans. Both sides hurtled grenades and fired howitzers, while tanks, planes, and U-boats dealt their own deadly blows.

In April 1917, America finally joined the war, and President Woodrow Wilson implemented the Selective Service Act, drafting millions of men into service. The United States, many believed, was in a struggle of freedom versus tyranny, democracy versus imperialism, good versus evil. Army recruitment materials depicted Germans as apes, carrying off helpless maidens. Boy Scouts sold bonds to fund the war. Women were encouraged to work in munitions factories, while kids in backyards play-acted with stick rifles. They saw themselves as heroes, one and all.

For most Americans, pastors included, stoking fervor for God and country went hand in hand. Killing was more palatable when seen as holy war.

The Swansons viewed it differently.

As loyal citizens, Father and Mother were grateful for their liberties and stood by their president's decision, but they did not take lightly the loss of life. Even though DeKalb County had been named after a Revolutionary War hero, it was sobering to imagine their own youngsters facing enemy bullets and flamethrowers. The Bible the Swansons read daily to their children spoke of God's love for all humanity. He cared as much for soldiers born in Berlin as for those born in Chicago or Sycamore.

* * *

As World War I ground toward a conclusion, the Swansons did their best to scrape by. With the addition of baby Rose, Mother now had seven mouths to feed. She was grateful for Emil's job as a tenant farmer.

Highly regarded in the community, he was a good judge of draft horses and earned a small profit by working the dairies and cornfields. Of course, tenant farming was a fickle business. Bad weather, inferior seed, and unethical landowners often made things difficult if not impossible.

Oh my, Mother said, the daylight's almost gone.

She changed little Rose and put her down for a rest, then moved into the kitchen to prepare a meal for her boys. Her swollen belly pressed against her apron as she drew her hair into a bun. She itched at her tummy, then noticed five-year-old Everett in the doorway.

Baby number six, she told him. You have a brother or sister on the way.

Everett absorbed this stoically. Though he was a child of few words, he had plenty of strength and stamina, topped off with a bit of mischief. He stomped around in oversized boots and hefted milk containers half his height. He trudged through the fields like his father, chopping at pesky thistles. When the older boys wrestled in the evenings, he didn't hesitate to throw himself into the fray.

Mother tussled his hair. Everett, she said, go fetch us some corn and start shucking. It's nearly time for supper.

He nodded and marched off.

She sighed and wondered, as all mothers do, what her young son's future might hold. Some parents pushed their kids toward high-end salaries and acclaim. She was more concerned about personal character. Ray, her oldest, was already impressing his teachers with his sharp mind, and Les and Lawrence were gentle, good-hearted boys. They'd do well, she had no doubt.

What about Everett, though? He was harder to figure.

The boy would be starting school in another year, and while staying quiet would be no problem for him, sitting still would pose a challenge. Where would he put all that energy? Perhaps he'd grow to work the soil like his father, tilling, planting, and harvesting for hour upon hour without complaint.

Oh, enough of her musings. She had mouths to feed.
May the Lord do with her son as He so willed.

Chapter 2

TIME TO GROW

Everett's feet were rooted like stumps to the floorboards. Standing in the store aisle, he stared at the Rawlings baseball mitt on the shelf and wondered how much it cost.

C'mon, his brother Lawrence said. The clerk won't bite.

Why can't you just ask him for me?

'Cause you gotta do it yourself.

Everett's legs refused to budge. He touched the mitt's stitching and breathed in the scent of leather. He had friends who owned gloves and he wanted one badly, but he couldn't bring himself to make a basic inquiry. What if his crooked teeth showed? What if he stood there, mouth hanging open, and not a word came out?

He thought of a section Father liked to quote from Proverbs 17:28: "Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace."

Lawrence clapped a hand over his shoulder. For cryin' out loud, how're you going to make it in school if you can't even talk to your teacher?

Everett wondered the same thing.

Almost six years old, he had spent most of his days on the farm picking berries, baling hay, climbing trees, and going fishing. He tried to do all the things his big brothers did and looked forward to the day Father would let him borrow the shotgun to deal with rodents in the crops. He also latched onto his oldest brother, Ray, eager to absorb his knowledge in budding film technology. A camera allowed Everett to get close to a subject without drawing attention to himself.

Despite his active body and mind, Everett was still too shy to open his mouth. He figured it was best to be counted wise. Words, to him, were like coins to be saved—and he was saving up for something worthwhile.

* * *

Sometime in 1919 or 1920, the Swanson family of eight piled into the car with all their luggage and drove over two thousand miles west, from Sycamore to Seattle. Washington's waterfalls and snow-cloaked mountains left them in awe, as did the stories of gold prospectors and lumberjacks. The land was unspoiled, untamed. Father said they would make a better living here as they attended a church up on Queen Anne Hill.

It was school that worried Everett. He'd be entering first grade.

How far would he have to walk to class? Would he like his teacher? If she gave him loads of homework, would he still have to milk ten cows twice a day?

Before he and his brothers could head for the schoolhouse, Mother lined them up by birth order for a photograph—Ray, Les, Lawrence, Everett, Rose, and little Robert. Feeling bashful, Everett tugged at his tweed cap, pretty sure this was his first photo ever.

The camera flashed, and he blinked against the magnesium flare. Maybe, he mused, he should grow up to be a photographer. While hiding behind the lens, he could even earn enough money to buy a baseball mitt. Last summer he'd seen orchestra bands and Red Cross banquets celebrating the soldiers who returned from the war. Wouldn't it be great if he could bring such things to life through a camera?

Time to get going, Everett's mother told him. Don't want to be late on your very first day, do you?

Everett turned to catch up with his brothers.

Whoa, hold on, Mother said, snatching the cap from his head. You

look like a little urchin, hair going every which way.

He squirmed in her grip.

Father grinned over a cup of black coffee, his boots already muddy from his morning tasks. Poor kid's going to go bald if you keep that up, Emma.

Please don't encourage him.

Father's voice turned stern. All right, son, hold still for Mother.

The second the comb stopped raking through Everett's hair, he squashed the cap back over his head and darted up the path toward school.

Did Everett first hear of the Korean peninsula in that tiny Seattle classroom? Or perhaps from a visiting missionary at a service on Queen Anne Hill? He himself never specified when God planted this seed in his heart. Like most Americans, he knew very little about that ancient land. Korea was clouded in mystery, just a faraway spot on the map.

The seed needed time to grow.

Chapter 3

JUST ONE GLIMPSE

All right, I know it's our last week in Seattle, Father said. That doesn't change the fact it's Easter Sunday and we are going to church as a family. Everyone into the car.

It was April 1, 1923, but as far as Everett was concerned, there would be no pranks played today. Despite their family's planting of gardens, tending of orchards, and raising of cows, they'd been unable to make ends meet. After much deliberation, Father and Mother had decided it would be best to return to tenant farming in Sycamore. There, at least, corn and dairy products were hot commodities. In the town itself, the Borden's Condensed Milk plant relied daily on fresh local milk.

Are you ready to celebrate Christ's resurrection? Father called from behind the wheel.

He is risen, Mother answered.

He is risen, indeed!

Everett groaned, which earned him a sharp look. He slumped into the back, squeezing between Les and Robert. None of this seemed fair. Who said they had to move again? Why did he have to leave his friends before fourth grade was even over?

They rumbled up Queen Anne Hill to the big red church. Flowers budded along the walkway and a Swedish flag flew overhead.

The Swedish Baptist General Conference had its roots in pietism. The movement emphasized personal transformation, biblical doctrine, and a desire for holy living. It wasn't enough to just study and pray. Faith should be put into action. Believers were to deal kindly with unbelievers instead of avoiding them, and they were to show special concern for orphans and widows.

At the curb, Everett and his siblings spilled from the car for inspection. Father checked for loose shoelaces and untucked shirts.

Les, he said, your tie's knotted all wrong. And Rose, darling, your bow's about to fall out of your hair.

Oh, leave them be, Mother said, nudging her husband. You tease me about the way I fuss over the children before school. Well you, dear, are just as bad.

Orderliness is important, he responded. This is God's house.

Everett wasn't sure yet what he thought about God—not that his parents knew this. He and his siblings were expected to be at church every time the doors opened and always in proper attire. Even if appearance didn't guarantee godliness, it was supposed to establish a sense of reverence. And were there any people more reverent than his parents? Father taught Sunday school and served as a deacon, while Mother filled in as an organist. Faith affected every part of their lives.

Father and Mother's dedication was equally evident at home. More than once, Everett heard his parents crying out to God for lost souls. For them, there was no greater joy than to hear of a person who converted.

Which meant converting souls must be the greatest calling of all.

There was little chance, though, of Everett becoming a preacher. While his brother Ray wanted to work with evangelistic films, and Les and Lawrence planned to be ministers of the gospel, Everett preferred pulling on boots and tromping through the barnyard over wearing a tie and sitting motionless in a pew. Unsure of his own beliefs, he was too small to be a preacher, too afraid to speak up.

Of course, this was all about to change.

* * *

The morning's sermon began with a story about a sycamore tree. The story was found in Luke 19:2–6: "Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature."

Nine-year-old Everett could relate. He wasn't sure he knew who Jesus was, and right now he couldn't even see over the heads in the row in front of him.

"So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree."

Sycamore. This caught Everett's attention. Just like their hometown.

Whether he liked it or not, he'd soon be back in Illinois amongst the trees that hugged the Kishwaukee River. A Native American tribe had once lived there, hewing dugouts and weaving baskets from bark. The Potawatomi gave the waterway its name, meaning "river of the sycamores."

Why did Zacchaeus climb the tree? the pastor asked his congregation. Zacchaeus was an unpopular man, a tax collector, but none of that stopped him from trying to see Jesus as He passed by. He didn't

care how foolish he looked, so long as he could catch just one glimpse of the Lord.

Amen, someone muttered.

Everett wondered if he would ever be brave enough to look foolish. He pulled a leg under himself to sit higher and get a better view of the pulpit. Down the row, his father shot him a look and motioned for him to stay still.

The pastor returned to the text in Luke. “And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.’ So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.”

Everett’s interest in this message was growing. He pictured Jesus with a playful smile and Zacchaeus with a look of surprise. Jesus didn’t just call attention to the short guy in the tree but wanted to spend time with him.

“And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house’” (v. 9). Was this what it meant to be saved? Everett wondered. To see Jesus and to be seen by Him? To invite Him in with joy?

His heart shifted in his chest, and he planted both hands on the pew to further elevate himself. He sensed his father throwing him another reproachful look, but he was too intent on the pastor’s story to glance away. Never had the Scriptures seemed so relevant. He didn’t want to miss a word. If there were a tree in the middle of the aisle, he would have climbed it himself.

Father cleared his throat, a sure sign he was losing patience.

Everett didn’t even turn. Not now. This Easter morn, his eyes were on a Jesus who seemed more real, more present, than ever. His ears perked up as the pastor inquired if there were any present today who needed their own glimpse of the Savior? Was there anyone like Zacchaeus who wished to see and be seen?

When Everett stopped his bouncing, Father sighed in relief.

Now don't be shy, the pastor said. Respond boldly to the Spirit's nudging.

Unable to contain himself, Everett shot his hand into the air.

You there, young man. Hallelujah! Do you truly want to see Jesus and know His goodness for yourself? Do you understand the price paid upon the cross at Calvary? Do you repent this day of your sins?

Nodding, Everett felt tears well in his eyes.

Do you want Jesus to forgive and save your soul?

Yes!

Then today is your day of salvation. The pastor quoted from Luke 15:10: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Churchgoers rejoiced over Everett's decision and suddenly his parents were at his side, their eyes bright and wet in the sun-dappled sanctuary. He knew they had prayed for this moment since he was born—and now he was born again, part of their spiritual family. His sense of God's mercy was overwhelming.

Father chuckled. Oh, what a fool I was, son. And on April first, of all days. I thought you had to use the washroom, moving around in your seat as you were.

They all laughed.

Everett would remember this date for the rest of his life. "The moment I opened my heart's door to Jesus Christ," he later wrote, "I had a new responsibility to God to whom I now felt morally accountable; to Jesus Christ for He redeemed me with His precious blood; to the Holy Spirit who convicted and regenerated me; and to my fellow men everywhere for Christ had said, 'Ye are my witnesses, Go ye.'"

As a witness, Everett Swanson could no longer stay silent.

He finally had something worth talking about.

*Chapter 4***DEFENSELESS**

The flame in him did not die. If anything, Everett found his zeal for God burning brighter as he reached his early teens. He turned youth group testimonies into mini-sermons. He minced no words and spoke plainly from God's Word.

Resettled with his family in Sycamore Township, Everett often passed the Soldier's Monument that rose fifty feet above the courthouse lawn. A plaque at its base commemorated Civil War veterans who had "fought to preserve the Union, that the nation shall under God have a new birth of freedom."

While he felt a new freedom and respected Abraham Lincoln's ideals—a statue of the former president even guarded the high school's halls—his own loyalties were to the King of kings, the commander of the heavenly host.

Would a good soldier cower in a bunker and stay quiet? Would he pull away from the fight?

Absolutely not.

With hair slicked back, Everett marched from class to class at Sycamore High carrying his leatherbound Bible. If one of his teachers made a statement that seemed to oppose Scripture, he asked for the privilege of refuting it.

Everett's own brothers were impressed as he joined a gospel team, traveling to speak at the county jail, the sanatorium, the old folks' home, the local churches, and even on street corners. He overcame his shyness to face the crowds, and lives were changed as a result.

What made him such a fervent young man?

Money was never his goal. The Swansons were a frugal bunch, and aside from an occasional update to his wardrobe, he didn't spend much on himself.

Proving himself to his parents wasn't much of a factor either. They trusted and committed their kids to God's keeping, giving them plenty of personal liberty as they reached their mid-teens. Everett knew he had their full support.

Forgetting past sins may have fanned the white-hot fervency of some ministers but for Everett there weren't any deep dark secrets. As other boys his age chased girls, played sports, and worked on cars, he tilled the fields, sang in the school choir, and later participated in Future Farmers of America. Though he wasn't immune to temptation, he rarely had time for trouble.

Trouble was all around, though. It was in the news, in front-porch conversations, and in the streets only sixty miles east of Sycamore.

In 1929, Prohibition still held sway over Chicago, with bootleggers, speakeasies, and moonshine making headlines. Corruption and greed ran rampant. On February 14, Al "Scarface" Capone's men entered a garage on the city's North Side and used tommy guns to mow down seven rival mobsters. No arrests were ever made, and Capone became the area's undisputed crime lord.

Months later, on Wall Street, the hype of the Roaring Twenties came to a crashing halt on Black Monday as the market suffered its steepest decline ever. Panic set in. Private lives and public companies fell to shambles. By year's end, investors lost an estimated \$40 billion. Dozens of related suicides took place, with some plunging from bridges or buildings, and others choosing to eat a bullet.

It was the start of the Great Depression.

While witnessing these results of a lawless age, Everett received his lifelong call to the ministry. As stated in 1 Peter 3:15, a Christian should "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you." He believed now more than ever that it was his duty to be a defender of the faith.

His message was simple: Jesus offers love and forgiveness, free of

charge, for people everywhere—and all He asks in return is your life.

As battle lines were drawn between darkness and light, Everett was ready to say whatever he needed to say and go wherever he needed to go. There were no excuses. Hadn't Jesus instructed His disciples to spread into all the world and preach the gospel? Nearly two thousand years later, this world was more accessible than at any other time in history.

* * *

As Everett celebrated his sixteenth birthday in the winter of 1929, his older brothers were taking strides in their own vocations. Ray was in Seattle, and in years to come would work with Moody Bible Institute in science and film. Les was a gentle soul in the hard world of local loan collections, where he managed to inject godly wisdom and hope. Lawrence was dedicated to full-time ministry, with his eyes on a Midwest pastorate.

I need a paying job, Everett told his parents.

Oh, don't you have enough on your plate already? Mother said.

How am I supposed to travel and evangelize without a car?

You can go by bus or train, Father pointed out. Automobiles are a luxury.

Everett tried to contain his frustration. Things are changing, he said. These days, girls hardly even pay attention to a guy without a car.

Alright, son, is it a car or a girl you're after?

A job, he said hurriedly. I need a paycheck.

His mother squeezed his hand. Yes, you do, she said, eyes twinkling.

Armed with his parents' immigrant work ethic, Everett took a weekend shift at Turner Brass Works on the south end of town. In rows of barracks, employees created a variety of brass goods—nameplates, arc lamps, and gas lanterns—and provided light to countless homes and businesses. Decades later, Turner Brass would even make relay torches for the Los Angeles Olympics.

As satisfying as he found hard work, Everett wanted to provide spiritual light. Earlier that year, he and the students of Sycamore High had listened to the US president give his inaugural address over the radio. This was a first, and Everett wondered how he might use similar technology to share God's Word.

Eager to harness the potential in these new commodities, Everett would first need to deal with the various temptations each one presented. Like most teenage boys, he dreamed of driving his own automobile, but didn't realize until he climbed behind the wheel that he was a bona fide lead foot.

Oh, how he loved speed. The faster the better!

With an arm out the window, he wore a wide grin and let his fingers ride the wind. Was there any greater thrill than the roar of an engine and the blur of a curvy road? The joy of the moment erased any sense of wrongdoing.

Best be careful, Father warned him. Our police force just added an officer on motorcycle.

It's your safety that most concerns me, Mother said.

While Everett did his best to heed his parents, he drove as though nothing could hurt him. Lost in the moment, he often forgot where he was going. School, chores, work, none of it mattered when the air was whipping through his hair. His high school yearbook, *The Oracle*, even made a point of mentioning: "Everett Swanson's excuses for morning tardiness are willed to Weslie Lindstrom."

Despite the excuses and tardiness, Everett walked his high school halls with purpose. He was a junior now, with sinewy arms and sturdy shoulders. He loped past the boys in their letterman sweaters, his blue eyes fixed straight ahead and his Bible firmly in hand—until the day a girl with auburn hair stepped into view.

Her name was Miriam Edwards.

And the defender found himself defenseless.

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