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Who is Jesus. . .Really?

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[A DIALOGUE ON SKEPTICISM, EVIDENCE, AND TRUTH]



COFFEE

HOUSE

CHRONICLES

IS THE
BIBLE

TRUE . . . REALLY?

JOSH MCDOWELL
AND DAVE STERRETT

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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One

INTELLECTUAL SKEPTICISM

Mid-September

“HOW MANY of you all—or should I say *y’all*—grew up in Texas?”

About half of the hands in the classroom went up.

“Good, glad to see it. My wife and I have enjoyed living here for almost twelve years now. We’ve learned a few things too. For example, here in the South, especially right here in Dallas, the *buckle* of the Bible Belt, we dare not question the historical authority of the books of the Bible, or we’re damned to hell!”

A few chuckles echoed across the small auditorium. Dr. William Peterson,



Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies and a renowned expert on ancient textual criticism, was well known for his views. Smiling wryly, he continued, “Honestly, I appreciate the concern these fundamentalists, Catholics, and evangelicals have for our souls, and I believe they are genuinely sincere—just sincerely misled.”

Nick, a freshman at Opal University, listened intently as Dr. Peterson went on. “Conservative Christians are quick to judge those of us in academia for our views, but my question for them would be, ‘What is the historical basis for believing the Bible really is the inerrant Word of God?’ I want to know what persuades them to actually believe that the copies of the Bible translated today are even close to what was originally written down? It *sounds* good and faithful, but what are the facts? That’s what we’re here to explore. Are you ready for the facts?”

The room fell silent as the professor paused for effect. “Here are the facts that leading scholars all across the country agree upon. *We don’t even have the words that these fundamentalist Christians tell us God inerrantly inspired.* That’s right. All we have are words copied by scribes—sometimes correctly but certainly not always. We have error-ridden copies that are centuries removed from the originals and different from them in thousands of ways.”¹

Nick’s heart raced as he listened to the professor contradict what his pastor back home at Park Springs Com-

munity Church had taught the congregation. He sensed in his spirit this was his time to be bold for Christ and take a stand for the Lord. “That’s not true!” he declared. “How dare you question God’s Word.”

The professor, somewhat taken aback by the student’s interruption, responded kindly. “Very well, why don’t you tell us what *is* true. What’s not accurate about what I just said?”

Nick, now feeling a tad embarrassed and put on the spot, raised his voice. “Well, I’m a Christian and I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. I accept it as the Word of God by *faith*! Hebrews says, ‘Without faith it is impossible to please God,’ and since God is sovereign and we are just human beings, who are we to question His sovereignty? Also, the Bible says, ‘All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that everyone will always be prepared to give an answer.’”

Dr. Peterson smiled and nodded. “I admire your personal faith and concern to quote portions of Hebrews 11 and 2 Timothy 3. Would you remind me of your name?”

“I’m Nick.”

“I’m glad you’re in this class, Nick. I remember memorizing those same verses myself. Looking back, I think it was when I attended Calvin Christian Academy during my early teens.” Noting Nick’s look of surprise, he continued,

“By the way, Nick, I think 2 Timothy 3 ends by saying, ‘so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.’ Perhaps, you were conflating it with 1 Peter 3:15, which mentions giving an answer or defense. That’s okay, and really beside the point. What I was saying earlier, Nick, is that we really can’t be sure the original book of Hebrews and the letter of 2 Timothy actually *said* the words you just quoted and that we both memorized. We don’t have the ‘original’ of the Bible. The Bibles that you and I own have been radically changed over the past two thousand years.”

“I don’t believe that!” Nick blurted out.

“Oh? Would you care to educate us then?” asked the distinguished professor. The rest of the class murmured their annoyance at this rude, outspoken Christian.

“Well . . . um,” Nick stumbled. “You can’t, uh, I mean it’s not only about the words, Professor. God continues to change lives. I experience the presence of Jesus in my life every day. And . . . um . . . oh yeah, I remember—when I went to youth camp in Tyler we had this former atheist speak to us and he told us his testimony and shared that we have archeological evidence and old historical manuscripts, or copies of the Bible, that verify God’s Word. Professor, this former atheist is now a Christian!” Nick asserted this last part with confidence, believing the Holy Spirit had helped him finish stronger than he started.

“Nick, it certainly is true that we have manuscripts or copies of the early letters and gospels written, but what *type* of manuscripts is the question! I’ve looked at some of these manuscripts myself, Nick, and the number of variants, or differences, between various handwritten copies is in the hundreds of thousands!”² The majority of scholars in the country have come to recognize these facts. For example, a man I respect, Bart Ehrman, the head of the religion department at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, has published some excellent academic works on textual criticism.”

Dr. Peterson took a few steps closer to his students and sat on his stool near the front row where Nick was sitting. “Nick, I admire your sincere faith and I respect your religion, but the purpose of this class is to study religion *historically*. Class, let me ask you a question. Where is the *original* Bible that God inspired? Is it located in some museum? Does anyone know? Nick? Anybody?”

The class was silent, and by this time Nick was speechless as well.

“Come on, class, join the conversation. Anyone can speak up and help Nick out!” After a few awkward moments, the professor continued, “It’s okay, Nick. Nobody knows. Listen to me, class. *We don’t have the original*. There is no evidence that a ‘God’ inspired these letters. If this God of the Bible existed and was all-powerful, don’t you think He

would have cleared up the confusion for us all? For example, if you grew up going to church like I did, or like our friend Nick, your Bible probably has four gospels in the New Testament. But did you know there were many other gospels that were *not* included? What about the *Gospel of Thomas*, or the gospels of Philip or Mary Magdalene?³

“Students, I care about your personal beliefs. But I also care about your intellectual honesty in all areas—including the history of religion. I wish I had time to explain all of this to you today, but we’ll get to it as the semester progresses. The message of Christianity is nothing new or unique. When I began studying biblical literature in graduate school, I discovered that stories of dying and rising gods, virgin births, and miracle workers were already widespread throughout the known world when the gospels were written.⁴ We’ll look into these things in more depth the next time we’re together. Class dismissed.”

Two

THE CARUTH HAVEN COFFEEHOUSE

NICK STORMED OUT of class furious and frustrated. As he walked by the science hall he heard a familiar voice. “Nick! Nick! How are you?”

He turned and saw Andrea, a biology major he had met the first day of orientation, cutting across the lawn to catch up with him.

“Hey, Andrea,” Nick said.

“Nick, are you okay? You seem really upset.”

“I’m all right, Andrea. It’s just that my religion professor, Dr. Peterson, said some things I don’t agree with.”

“You have Dr. Peterson? I loved his



class when I had him last year! What did he say?”

“It’s hard to explain. He and I just don’t see eye to eye on some things. Man, he’s got some strange ideas!”

Andrea smiled. “Nick, that’s what you told me the first time we got into a spiritual conversation, remember? I’m sure it will be okay. We’re still friends, right? Look, I’m headed over to the Caruth Haven Coffeehouse to study for a few hours. Why don’t you come with me so we can talk about it?”

Nick looked at his watch, and then nodded. “All right. I’ve got some time before my next class.”

Later, at a table by the window, Andrea took a sip of her caramel macchiato and looked at Nick. “So, what’s on your mind, Nick? What did Dr. Peterson say?”

“Andrea, you know I have a personal relationship with Jesus, right? I believe Scripture is God-breathed and Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. But Dr. Peterson told us the Bible has been changed, and that the Bibles we have today aren’t even true!”

“Nick, I understand that this is hard for you, but I took his class and I’m pretty sure that Dr. Peterson is right.”

“Here we go again,” said Nick, sighing.

“Nick, the Bible *has* been changed, but I still think it’s an inspiring book like the works of Homer, Virgil, and Plato. I understand what you’re going through, though. It was hard for me to accept until I started reading other reli-

gious books outside of my own circle. When I attended St. Mary's Academy in high school, *not one* of my theology instructors told me how the Catholic Church chose what books to put in the Bible. They also didn't tell me the copies of the Bibles used today by both Catholics and Protestants have been drastically transformed throughout history, sometimes intentionally by religious leaders. It makes sense though since they've been copied over and over for more than two thousand years."

Nick stared out the window, chewing on his stir stick.

"There's another thing, too," continued Andrea. "My church never once told me that the Christian story plagiarized and borrowed from pagan myths that were around long before Christianity!"

"Hey, Dr. Peterson said something about that too! What's that all about, anyway? Is that what Dan Brown was talking about in his novels?"

"Nick, it's history. Dr. Peterson told us numerous other stories: Mythras, Appolonius, Sabbati, and others. Have you seen that YouTube video called *Zeitgeist, The Greatest Story Ever Sold?*"

"The what?"

"Okay, check this out."

Andrea turned her MacBook around so Nick could watch the clip. He plugged his headphones in, hit play, and heard about religious leaders throughout history who had

similar life characteristics to Jesus. The video implied that Christianity simply plagiarized from other religious stories that were circulating years before Jesus' birth. Names like Attis of Greece, Krishna of India, Dionysus of Greece, and Mithra of Persia were included in the video. The narrator described how, based on astrology, each of these religious leaders was born of a virgin on December 25, discovered by a star in the East, was adored by three kings, began teaching at twelve, was baptized into ministry at thirty, had twelve disciples, performed miracles, was known as the "Lamb of God" and "The Light," and was crucified, buried, and resurrected on the third day.

Nick was speechless during the entire video except for the one time he rolled his eyes and said, "Noooo waaaayyyy."

At the end of the clip, Nick looked at Andrea. "Hey, regardless of what Dr. Peterson and that stupid YouTube video say, I still believe that the Bible is God's Word, by *faith!*"

Nick didn't want to admit it to Andrea, but for a few seconds he had questioned the truthfulness of his Christian beliefs.

"Andrea," Nick continued. "God's Word is not going to come back void and I trust that His Spirit speaks through me when I don't know what to say. Even when I don't have all the answers, God is sovereign and is changing lives through His Spirit. Besides, that video is probably just a

hoax. I'm out of here, Andrea. I need to get to class."

Andrea watched him fill his backpack.

Before leaving the table, Nick asked, "Hey, are you going to that party on Friday?"

"What party?"

"The one at Jessica's," responded Nick.

"Yes! I'm there, but what about you? I didn't think you were the drinking type."

"I'm not. But you know, God has called me to be salt and light. Even Jesus came eating and drinking with sinners like you, Andrea! Just kidding, but Jesus did say, 'It's not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick.'"

"Nick, you're goofy, but I like you. You may hold some old-school views of the Bible, but at least you're genuine."



As the weeks passed and Nick got to know Dr. Peterson better, he began entertaining doubts about his faith. In some sense, he still sought to be a "Christian witness" and to share a message of repentance and trusting in Christ, but sometimes he got discouraged. Not only were there no "converts," but he also found it difficult to reconcile his beliefs with what he was learning in class. Gradually, as he talked less about Jesus and learned more about the unreliability of the Bible, he began to drift from the

conservative faith he had grown up with.

One night at another of Jessica's parties, Nick drank a few more beers than he anticipated. Before long he was getting physical with Jessica. It started with grinding as they danced closely to an old Jay-Z song, then progressed to making out in the hot tub after some of the others had left. Three weeks and several dates later, he did something that would certainly disappoint his parents and former youth pastor if they found out. He lost his virginity. For most nineteen-year-olds, this might not have seemed like such a big deal, but for Nick it was huge. He was smitten with guilt and felt like he had turned against God. Years ago at a church youth conference Nick had pledged not to have sex until marriage, and now he had broken his word and violated his commitment.

[A DIALOGUE ON GOD, MAN, AND GRACE]



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... REALLY?

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One

COFFEEHOUSE SHOWDOWN

*Late September
Opal School of Religion
Dallas, TX*

THE AUDITORIUM was packed. Hundreds of students, faculty, and donors turned out for the humanitarian dinner, and Dr. William Peterson, professor emeritus at Opal School of Religion, was about to deliver the keynote. He walked onstage to hearty applause, spread his notes on the lectern, and made eye contact with friends.

“Thank you for that very gracious welcome. Honestly, the students who organized this event deserve all the recognition,



and I'll be asking one of them to join me up here in just a moment. First, let me highlight an important upcoming event here at the school of religion.

"We're pleased to announce an exciting new lecture series entitled 'The Historical Christ: Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up.' Beginning October 8, right here in Wesley Auditorium, three professors—including two of our own—will be exploring and debating the historicity of Jesus Christ. This is something you won't want to miss."

Nick, sitting at a front table, nodded at his friend and instructor, Jamal Washington. Jamal would be one of those speakers, and Nick couldn't wait.

Dr. Peterson went on to recognize several teams of students who spent their summer months working with orphans and refugees in Majority World countries. Then, turning to his right, he invited one of them, Jessica Friesen, to join him at the podium and describe this year's student-led humanitarian campaign. Nick's heart pounded as Jessica crossed the stage. She looked *stunning*. He noted how long her hair looked when she wore it down, and how fit she looked, probably from her marathon training. *If only I'd acted differently she might still be interested in me*, he mused. *Maybe I should have . . . huh?* His friend Jared was shoving a note under his elbow. He unfolded it and read, "Hey—close your mouth, chump!"

Nick smiled at him, and then turned back toward Jessica. She had been completely transformed since coming to

faith in Christ five months ago. All she ever talked about was Jesus. No more getting wasted with the girls at the bars on McKinney and Lower Greenville. She even turned him down one night when he asked her out for Tex-Mex. What was that about? She *loved* Tex-Mex. Nick was offended because her rejection seemed personal. Although she expressed genuine gratitude for his influence in leading her to trust Christ, the more she grew in her relationship with God, the less time she made for her relationship with him.

Then again, she *was* busy. Between her nineteen credit hours, leading the Sudan project for girls, and training for the marathon, the only time he saw her was at the weekly *I am Second* campus Bible study. He shook his head. Months ago he was the one resisting a romantic relationship because of her disinterest in Christianity. Now she was avoiding him! It just didn't make sense.

Jessica closed with a story about the Opal students who had traveled to Sudan during the summer. The audience was moved by her emotional appeal and responded with a round of applause and cheering as she returned to her seat.

Throughout Dr. Peterson's lecture Nick glanced at Jessica and reflected on their times together. At one point, her eyes met his and she smiled before quickly looking back at Professor Peterson. She seemed to be moving on, and Nick felt convicted that he should be thinking more about the children in Sudan.

Two

JESUS CHANGING ROCK STARS

IT WAS TUESDAY NIGHT and two hundred students were packed into McCulloch Coffee House for the weekly *I am Second* Bible study. Following a strong set of worship songs from the band, Nick mounted the stage while everyone else found seats. He wore a black T-shirt with bold white letters proclaiming *I am Second*. Grabbing the microphone he spoke with clarity and confidence. “*I am second, and so are you! We’re second because*

Jesus Christ is first!” At these simple words the students broke out in applause. One thing was for certain—this group didn’t lack for enthusiasm.



Nick continued, “Before we show this

week's video, I'm going to read you one of the all-time greatest descriptions of Jesus Christ ever written. It's from the apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians."

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.¹

As soon as Nick finished reading, Jessica stepped onstage and led the students in a prayer. On her "amen," the lights dimmed and the *I am Second* video began. Nick was pumped. *This powerful story was bound to get some feedback!*

The video kicked off with eerie music in a totally dark room. A weird light shone over a white chair, and the voice of Brian "Head" Welch, former lead guitarist for the band Korn, came from off camera. Then he was sitting in the chair,

surrounded by darkness, and covered with tattoos—including a tattoo of a small cross outside his right eye. The students were silent as Welch told his story with great sincerity.

“There was a few times where life seemed good. My daughter Jenna came into the world and it was just such a euphoric feeling. I thought my life could just feel like that forever. I thought I was ‘spiritual,’ but I couldn’t stay sober. I hit rock bottom. I’d sworn that I would never do methamphetamines again because I saw what it did to my child’s mother. It just took my wife’s feelings away and made her leave her kid. I just wanted my wife dead. I wanted to kill her. I thought she was the scum of the earth. How could she do drugs like that and let the drugs win her like that? So I was never going to do meth again.

“I ended up with an everyday crippling addiction to methamphetamine and everything that I said about my ex-wife came true for me. I sunk to the lowest gutter I could ever think of. I would spend time with my kid and I would still be on it because I needed it to function. I would get up in the morning and have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and

snort meth and then take her to school. I was a junkie. My life was just spinning out of control. Jenna had come out on one of the tours. I just remember her skipping around singing one of our Korn songs called 'A.D.I.D.A.S.' 'All Day I Dream About Sex.' And I'm going like, 'What am I doing? I'm a junkie, my daughter is singing all day I dream about sex, and I'm going to die.'

"My real estate broker, Eric, said, 'Brian, I don't mean to be weird with you, I hope you don't take this the wrong way, but I felt the Scripture jump out at me. I've never done this before so I don't really know how to do this, but I felt like this would mean something to you. It's Matthew 11:28. Jesus says, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."'"

"I remember, all tweaked out, looking up in the dictionary 'weary.' I looked up 'burdened' and I pulled the Scripture apart. I admitted, 'I'm wearied and burdened and I need rest for my soul.' I didn't know if it was real, but they invited me to church a couple weeks later and I said a prayer to receive Christ at the church but I went home just like

I used to do. I neglected my daughter, got it all smooth and powdery. But before I took it, I prayed, 'Jesus, You gotta take these drugs from me. Search me right now. Search my heart.'

"Something happened. I felt so much fatherly love from heaven and it was like 'I don't condemn you. I love you. I love you.' It was just love and instantly that love from God came into me. It was so powerful that the next day I threw away all my drugs and I quit Korn. I said, 'I'm quitting Korn and I'm going to raise my kid the right way.' I got the love from God coming into me and then it came out of me to my kid. It changed me. My heart was changed and I said to my daughter, 'Jenna, Daddy's going to be home with you all the time. I'm quitting my career.' And her face lit up and she was like, 'for me?' She felt so special and God used her to save me . . . to save her life later on."²

Nick returned to the stage as the lights came back up. He had a small leather Bible in his hand and chose his words carefully. "Maybe you too feel weary and burdened. If we're all willing to be honest, most of us have felt wearied.

Last year, at least for me, it was late nights, hangovers, and some serious confusion about my life. Even now I struggle between having fun and doing well in school . . . not to mention that I'm totally addicted to caffeine. Every student knows what it's like to be burdened, and to carry heavy loads. If that's you right now, here's something you should know. You don't have to figure it all out before coming to Jesus.

"Maybe you can relate to Brian Welch. Meth is a tough master. But so is drinking too much, or doing *anything* too much. You heard what he said about how to gain your freedom.

"Or maybe you watched that entire video and thought, 'I may not be perfect, but I don't have *any* problems like *that* guy had. I'm a good person living a good life and I'm good with God. Why surrender my life to Jesus?'

"Let me ask you a couple of questions. Have you ever told a lie?" Nick smiled. "Yeah, me too. The trouble is, that makes you and me *liars*. Have you ever had lust in your heart? How about your eyes—ever looked with lust at someone? Jesus said that anyone who lusts has committed adultery in his heart. Before I came to Jesus last year I looked at pornography all the time. Believe me, I know what it's like to get wasted and treat girls disrespectfully. How about this—have you ever hated anyone? Jesus said anyone who hates his brother or sister has committed murder in his

heart. That makes every one of us a lying, adulterous murderer. You can check all this out in the gospel of Matthew, chapter five.

“We’ve all done lots of good things, and most of us live with the best of intentions. But compared to the infinite goodness and holiness of a Perfect Being, our best actions will never measure up. There’s only one way to be good enough to stand before a holy God. You have to let Him forgive you. Today can be the day you receive Christ. He paid for your sin with His death. Accept that gift and make Him first in your life.

“Now is the perfect time to make a decision about Jesus. We’re not promised tomorrow. Let’s suppose hypothetically that you leave here tonight and get hit by a drunk driver. As you stand before God to give an account of your life, will you stand guilty . . . or innocent? Do you think you would go to heaven . . . or hell? If you don’t know Jesus, I encourage you to talk with Him right now. Confess your sin, accept His forgiveness, and give Him control over your life. He died in your place and will forgive you and cleanse you of all of your sin!”

[A DIALOGUE ON LIFE, DEATH, AND HOPE]



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DID THE
RESURRECTION
HAPPEN . . . REALLY?

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One

TENSION ON CAMPUS

TENSION ON CAMPUS was thick. The administrators of Opal University could not remember a more volatile season. Factions among the student body were growing militant, and violence seemed a real possibility.

Politics and social issues were always volatile topics among students, but strained relations had boiled over when one of the Opal instructors presented a strong case for the historical Christ during a debate with two visiting scholars—an atheist and an agnostic. The ensuing weeks had seen nonstop confrontations, sometimes ugly, between religious and atheist groups on campus.



Jamal Washington, the instructor who presented the historical Christ at the debate, was a doctoral student who taught several undergraduate courses in the school of religion. He was also thought to be responsible for the faith conversions of *emeritus* religion professor, Dr. William Peterson, and several students from the atheist club.

One month after the debate, Dr. Peterson delivered a stirring lecture on the deity of Christ, and even more students came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God. It was after Dr. Peterson's lecture that Jamal received his first piece of hate mail.

The unsigned letter was on his office floor one morning, evidently slipped under the door. Jamal didn't seem too worried about it. He viewed the controversy as harmless "hot air" stirred up by a few opinionated student leaders. While the atheist club members certainly didn't agree with Washington and Peterson, they weren't hostile.

Brett, an agnostic and former leader in the atheist club, was beginning to question his own skepticism. His family, well educated and academic, had a history of investigating new ideas before embracing them, and Brett was taking his time with this Jesus thing. No one would ever accuse Brett of an emotional conversion to anything—especially religious faith.

Earlier in the week, at Nick's invitation, Brett had attended a class taught by Dr. Peterson. Though *emeritus*,

Dr. Peterson frequently filled in for his former colleagues in the religion department. The topic of Jesus' resurrection had come up in class, and Brett decided to stop by the religion hall to ask Dr. Peterson a few questions. The resurrection was a key issue in his pursuit of truth.

Brett was within a block of the religion hall when he noticed students running from the building. *Must be a fire drill*, he thought. But something wasn't right. *Nobody runs during fire drills*. Then he heard screaming. Brett was a premed major and wired for action, and the screaming kicked him into response mode. "Gotta go!" he shouted as he flipped his phone closed, shoved it in his pocket, and took off at a run *toward* whatever was happening.

Students were pouring from the religion hall, screaming and running in every direction. As Brett approached, one girl stumbled and collapsed on the lawn not twenty feet in front of him. It actually looked like there was blood all over her T-shirt. Brett crouched beside her. She was breathing in short gasps and seemed frantic to get back up.

"Where are you hurt?" Brett shouted amidst the chaos. "What happened?"

"I'm shot!" she screamed. "He's shooting everyone!"

Brett immediately grabbed his cell phone, dialed 9-1-1, and with a shaky voice yelled for help. The call took under a minute, and then he lifted the girl in his arms and, as fast

as he could, moved her to a safe place across the street. She was crying hysterically.

“Where are you hurt?”

“My shoulder!” She seemed to be slipping into shock.

Now there were sirens everywhere and police cars were arriving from all directions. Police officers poured out and ran toward the building. It was all happening so fast it seemed like a dream . . . a bad dream that didn’t make any sense.

The girl in Brett’s lap passed out.

Two

GRIEVING

SLOWLY, THE STORY unfolded. Dr. Peterson and his wife, Susan, clung to each other and sobbed as they watched the nonstop news coverage, now on every channel. Nine students had died in a shooting at the school of religion . . . including Jamal Washington, Nick Ridley, and the shooter, who eventually turned the gun on himself. Dr. Peterson was wracked with grief *and* guilt. He couldn't stop berating himself for not seeing this coming.

Why had he not pressed the administration or police to investigate all the hate literature and threats?

“Bill, don't put this guilt on yourself. There is nothing more you could have done



to stop it. You reported every one of those notes to the authorities,” said Susan Peterson as she tried to console her husband.

So far, the news coverage had revealed that the shooter was a student. Like so many similar campus killers, he was a troubled young man. A loner with few friends. His roommate said in an interview, “He never even talked to *me*. We sometimes invited him to hang out with us, but he always said ‘no’ and acted awkward around us. We had no idea he was planning to kill anyone. We just thought he was weird.”

Another student, a member of the atheist club, commented that he had seen the suspected shooter attend several of the atheists’ meetings. “He rarely spoke up, but when he did he always seemed angry about the Christians. Definite anger issues.”

“Bill,” Susan said as she turned back to the TV coverage, “this student being interviewed looks familiar.”

“Yes, you’re right,” Bill replied. “That’s Brett. Nick brought him over here after my lecture. In fact, I was supposed to meet with him this morning.”

“Okay, I remember. Was he the one with the motorcycle?”

“That’s him. A premed major, and a very bright boy.”

The reporter turned to face the camera and said, “We’re talking with Brett Wilson, a senior at Opal University, who was on his way to meet with a religion professor when he saw a young coed, covered in blood, running out of the

religion building. Brett, tell us again what happened.”

“Well, students were pouring from the building, and one of them, a young woman, collapsed in front of me as I approached the front doors. I noticed she had blood all over her shoulder, so I called 9-1-1 and within minutes the police arrived.”

“You also mentioned—before we went on the air—that you had indeed met the suspected killer several months ago.”

“That’s right. I don’t remember his name, but he showed up a few times at the atheist club. He didn’t fit in very well and seemed awkward in a group setting. He said things that made people uncomfortable. But he sure was intelligent. I remember arguing with him at one point.”

“Why did you argue with him?” the reporter asked.

“Like I mentioned earlier, he was pretty angry most of the time. He came to one of our meetings saying that, if there’s no God, there’s no right or wrong. Since we’re merely the result of a deterministic evolutionary process, we should get rid of all religion, people with genetic defects, and inferior races. That’s what we argued about, and we asked him not to come back since we don’t put up with racism in the club. We never saw him again after that.”

“Why didn’t you report this?” asked the reporter.

“Honestly, none of us took him seriously. We figured he was taking freshman philosophy and trying it out on our

group. We never assumed he was for real about getting rid of people. You meet a lot of racists on campus, and mostly they don't come back once they realize we don't share their views. We had no idea this guy was serious, and until yesterday none of us knew Mr. Washington had received death threats."

As the Petersons continued watching, they cried and prayed that despite the horror, God would somehow be glorified in this senseless tragedy. They prayed for Nick's parents, for Jamal's family, and for all the others impacted by the event. Especially Nick and Jamal's close friends, Jessica, Mina, Andrea, and Brett.