

# PROLOGUE

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**I was a privileged** Orange County co-ed on the math track at the rich kid's university.

Family? Well-positioned.

Test scores? Off the charts.

Resume? Increasingly marketable.

Good looks? Sure, if I tried.

Inside? Insecurity gnawed at my psyche.

The nerd on the front row of Calc II.

First to answer the prof's questions but last to strike up a conversation with the student in the next seat.

High school's most likely to ace college, but least likely to succeed in *life*.

A second grade math student could count the number of words I spoke socially my first semester.

Despite my best efforts to change, insecurity eroded everything going for me. No one believed in me, least of all myself.

Wasted. Hopeless. Broken. Lost.

Then YOU came and wrecked my brokenness.

I was loved—truly loved—for the first time. Not loved for my potential. Not loved for my performance. Not loved for my looks. Not loved for my connections.

Just loved.

Hope stepped out of the wreckage of our collision.

How do I explain the miracle of that day? These once-tight lips now gaping like a chasm, chattering incessantly about You. I still chuckle at wide-eyed responses: "Ruth Grant? You're *talking* to me?"

You daily speak words of renewal and destiny to me.

Destiny.

Destined to fulfill that final great task of life—of history. Not a vain American dream, or empty causes either.

Destined for something grander.

It's settled; You've spoken. This nerdy, broken-restored, Orange County girl was destined—is destined—for a globe-shaking endeavor.

Misunderstood by my church and by my parents but finally applauded by Christopher and Chara Owen.

And knowing *You*, You'll turn impossibility into a reality.

I'm stepping into the light-edged darkness with goose bumps and knocking knees.

And I couldn't be happier.

Stepping into my destiny.

—*From the journal of Ruth Grant*

# ONE

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**The cool moonlight** washing through the gothic windows competed with dancing shadows from the fire in the hearth. The effect on the walls was sinister—shifting, gargoyle silhouettes of the nine men sitting around the triangular table.

“Number Three, you asked for this meeting,” a raspy voice said from the front.

While a clerk in the shadowy corner recorded every word, a British baritone replied, “Gentlemen, we have a rapidly developing anomaly on the Rebirth timeline.”

“What sort of anomaly?” the raspy voice asked.

“In the past we have kept the Christian church at bay through a combination of time-tested strategies.”

“Such as?” A query came from across the table.

“Late 1800s,” a rapid-fire Korean voice answered, “when they became a threat, we ‘blessed’ them with prosperity. As they grew rich, they also grew apathetic and gave up their mission.”

“And in the early and mid-twentieth century,” a lilting Indian voice added, “we sowed discord that divided denominations with debate and left many impotent against our agenda. Then finally in the late twentieth century, we introduced enough New Age thinking and political correctness that another large swath of churches adopted a doctrine that all roads lead to the same place.” Number Eight smiled smugly, pleased with the success of these strategies. “Thus they lost their evangelistic fervor.”

“The prosperity strategy is also still working,” the Korean said. “Preoccupation with buildings, salaries, and programs has removed many from our opposition—unwilling to risk what they have gained materially to challenge us.”

The raspy voice grew impatient.

“So what is the issue, Number Three?”

“An anomaly,” the Englishman answered. “A combination of factors—generational values, economic downturn, the rise of a new cadre of pastors—have coalesced to produce a breed of

Christians and even church leaders who are breaking out of their lethargy. They are ignoring materialism, numerical success, and religious pluralism. They are looking for a new mission and a new *modus operandi*.”

He took a deep breath before delivering the dreaded news.

“This could interrupt our plans for the Rebirth.”

“What?” Number One’s eyes narrowed menacingly. “It is your job to be three steps ahead at all times!”

“That is why we asked for this meeting,” Number Three said boldly. “In order to stay three steps ahead, we must better coordinate the strategies of all three departments. This aberration is unusually resistant to the normal strategies of our Religion and Education Department. We must involve the Politics Department and the Science and Economics Department as well.”

“Surely you are not talking persecution, are you?” a Chinese voice protested. “You see what good that did for us in China.”

“Do not worry, Number Two. Though we misjudged the effect of religious persecution on the church in China, we are increasingly neutralizing it through economic prosperity. The growth has slowed dramatically. The new Chinese nationalist agenda should take care of the rest.”

“What are you planning?” the raspy voice asked. “What do you need from this group?”

The Englishman surveyed the room and leaned forward, eager to reveal the simple brilliance of the plan.

“We shall let these new ‘Jesus-followers’”—he sneered at the term—“move forward, but on the path of our choosing. Together we shall direct them through a variety of means—from character assassination to subtly redirecting their true mission. If necessary we will also add political repression.”

“So you are advocating persecution!” the Chinese voice retorted.

“Yes, but not like you are thinking. We shall attack in such a way that the world will see the church and Christians as the enemies of tolerance, political correctness, and everything decent. *They* will become the bad guys.”

The room fell silent.

afterthought, "And the militaristic propaganda pieces remain repressed?"

Questioning looks swept the room.

"Absolutely. No one will ever find them," the Englishman replied.

The clerk looked up but continued typing.

Number One stood, signifying the end of the meeting. "So be it. Number Three, convey to each department leader what is needed from his section."

Slowly he wagged his finger at each man around the table. "Let this be a lesson to each of you. We must act swiftly and ruthlessly. Nothing must stand in our way. We hold the advantage, for we realize this is war. As long as they do not, we win. Nothing must awaken the church to this reality!"

# TWO

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**Michael Wroth stormed out** of the Senate Chamber, his aides scurrying behind in fear. The striking redhead Marlene Hayes was alone at his side.

“Marlene! Call Hansen’s and Spears’s offices and find out what happened! Check with their assistants. They should know.”

“Got it.”

“We had that bill blocked yesterday, and those guys wouldn’t dare cross me. Someone powerful had to strong-arm them, and I want to know who it was! If their assistants won’t talk, get the senators on the line directly. In fact, catch their assistants before they leave this building. Now, do it!”

Senator Wroth dashed down the steps of Capitol Hill into his waiting limo. He was furious that someone had outmaneuvered him. But he was also intrigued that this unknown opponent could have such influence.

*It must be some lobbyist. But who? Who is strong enough to turn these men against me?*

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Marlene Hayes, Senator Wroth’s administrative assistant, would normally have accompanied him in the limo. But not today. She soon had Senator Spears’s AA cornered.

“What happened, Harold? Who got Senator Spears to swing his vote in favor of the Free Trade bill?”

“What are you talking about, Marlene? Senator Spears is free to change his vote as he thinks through the issues.”

“Harold, someone talked with him since yesterday morning, and I want to know who it was. Either you tell me, or Senator Wroth will talk to Senator Spears. Do you want to break the news to Senator Spears that Senator Wroth insists on speaking with him today?”

Harold’s eyes shifted nervously. He hated that Marlene could make him feel so spineless. “Okay. But you didn’t get it from me.”

Some call came in late yesterday.”

“What call, Harold? What time?”

“I don’t know, around quitting time. But I remembered hearing the same voice say the exact same thing fourteen years ago, and it made my skin crawl. Creepy. The last time I almost lost my job for refusing to put the call through. Somehow the man broke through on another line. The senator went berserk afterward, telling me if I ever had someone tell me ‘code ten’ again I was to connect him, even if I had to find him in Antarctica. I was as surprised as you were when Senator Spears swung his vote to support the bill. That phone call is the only thing I know that could have influenced him.”

“That’s it? There’s got to be more to it. Cough it up, Harold. Who is this mysterious caller, and what does ‘code ten’ mean?”

“I don’t know, Marlene. I’ve told you everything.”

“There must be something more.... What do you know about the caller?”

“Nothing except his voice. It was quiet, a little hoarse, like he might be an elderly gentleman. Maybe a slight European accent. Marlene, the senator’s going to be upset if I don’t hurry along.”

“Thanks for nothing, Harold. If you hear anything more, let me know. I expect Senator Wroth will still want to talk with Senator Spears personally. He won’t be satisfied with the information you’ve given me.”

“Tell him not to push too hard, Marlene. I know Senator Spears. It would take a lot to pit him against Senator Wroth. He must fear this mysterious caller more than he fears your boss, and there’s got to be a reason. If Senator Wroth meddles, he may be picking a fight too big even for him. Tell him to lick his wounds and aim to win the next time.”

“Senator Michael Wroth back down?” Marlene scoffed. “He lives for the fight, Harold! He won’t drop this until he understands what happened and how to win next time.”

“This is one fight he won’t win,” Harold said with growing assurance. He rushed off to find his boss, leaving Marlene feeling strangely unsettled.

She headed toward the Rotunda, deep in thought. Then her phone rang.

“Marlene, this is Jessica. We’ve got Hansen’s AA. She nearly got away from us, but Meg caught her on the east-side steps. I don’t think we can occupy her for long.”

“Good work, Jessica. I’m on my way.”

Marlene tried to process everything she had just heard, resisting the little voice telling her that Harold might be right. *What could be too big for Senator Wroth?*

Quickly Marlene’s attention turned to Senator Hansen’s AA, Anita Burdette. The sixty-four-year-old woman was widely seen as the queen of Capitol Hill’s AAs. She had held her role for the last thirty-nine years, and had the clout to go with it. Facing her was difficult, even for Marlene. If Harold was putty, Anita was granite.

*At least I have a little ammunition in my arsenal, thanks to Harold. I’m glad I ran into him first.*

She was almost too late. Jessica had been unable to detain Anita any longer, and she had turned to leave.

“Anita! May I have a word with you?” Marlene shouted after her. “Anita Burdette!”

Much as Marlene suspected Anita wanted to, she knew that Anita could not simply ignore her in public. Anita stopped and turned. There was rancor in her eyes, but she replied with a controlled voice.

“Why, Marlene, how good to see you. What might I be able to help you with?” As they drew near each other, she murmured, “Loyally running secret missions for Der Fuhrer?”

“Funny, Anita. I won’t mince words. Senator Wroth wants to know why Senator Hansen switched his vote on the Free Trade bill. Senator Wroth had understood that Senator Hansen opposed the bill.”

“Senator Hansen isn’t your boss’s puppet, Marlene. He doesn’t answer to anyone but his constituency. Understood?”

*She really is made of steel*, thought Marlene. But she spied a crack in Anita’s demeanor. Anita’s voice exuded confidence, but her eyes weren’t quite so firm.

“Not even when it’s a ‘code ten’?”

Anita’s hesitation told Marlene all she could hope to learn.

“What are you talking about? Senator Hansen weighed the



issues and voted his conscience. Now, unless you have something substantive to talk about, I must be going.”

“No, that’s it. But I don’t expect that Senator Hansen will be so defiant when Senator Wroth has him in a corner. Please inform the esteemed Senator Hansen that Senator Wroth will be talking with him today.”

“Senator Hansen is a busy man with a full schedule. Don’t assume he has time to burn for Senator Wroth.”

Anita clipped a defiant “Good day” and left.

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Senator Wroth paced the floor. “Code ten? What foolishness is this? I’ve never heard anything so preposterous! Spears’s AA is feeding you a bunch of hot air, Marlene.”

“Harold’s afraid to lie to me, sir. And Anita practically cringed when I said ‘code ten.’ It may not sound credible, but I believe Harold’s story to be true.”

Senator Wroth took a deep breath, accepted Marlene’s assessment, and settled in at his desk to ponder it.

Marlene waited. She knew not to bother Senator Wroth at such moments. She found it fascinating—almost exhilarating—to watch how quickly he could compose himself, think through a situation, and propose a course of action. It was this quality and his ability to get things done that had inspired her loyalty to him through his meteoric rise from local California politics.

Five minutes later Senator Wroth looked up to let Marlene know he had mapped out his strategy. Slowly and methodically, he outlined his plan.

“Get Spears on the phone first. While I’m on the phone with him, get Hansen on standby.”

“Yes, Senator.”

A moment later Marlene notified him that Senator Spears was on the phone.

“Marty! How are you? You can’t imagine how shocked I was when you voted for today’s bill. I thought you had agreed to oppose it.”

“Sorry, Michael, but I had a change of heart.”

“Marty, you know how many thousands of American jobs

hung in the balance with that vote. How could you have had such a fundamental change of heart in twenty-four hours? Is there more to this?"

Though Senator Wroth spoke cordially, Senator Spears was clearly uneasy.

"Michael, I can't explain why my decision changed, but it did. You're going to have to accept it. It was only one bill, okay?"

"Listen, Marty," Senator Wroth said, keeping his growing rage in check. "I don't care if it was a bill on the production of clothespins. Something bigger is going on. You and I agreed we would vote against the bill. You betrayed my trust. Someone has scared you or manipulated you, and I want to know who it is!"

"I can't tell you anything, Michael. Let's just drop this."

"Marty, my sources tell me you received an unusual phone call yesterday afternoon, a 'code ten'? What is this all about?"

"Michael, this is one issue I can't discuss. If you know what's good for you, you'll stop. This is too big even for you. Good night!"

The phone went dead, and Senator Wroth knew it was useless to call Senator Spears back. He was clearly scared, and he wasn't going to talk.

"Senator," Marlene announced over the intercom, "I have Senator Hansen on the line when you're ready." Senator Wroth collected his thoughts and picked up the phone.

"Sam, how are you?"

Senator Sam Hansen was a senior senator from the Midwest. He didn't aspire to much and generally got along well with his colleagues. When Senator Wroth arrived in Washington, Senator Hansen had given him informal mentoring, and they had grown close. Normally he would listen to Senator Wroth, and often he went along with him. His response this time was out of form.

"Michael, I'm not going to play games with you. I know you're mad that I changed my vote today, and you are trying to find out why. I'll only tell you one thing. In my forty-three years in Washington, I have encountered a 'code ten' only four times. I have learned never to argue with it, and you will do well not to probe any further.

"And let your AA know if she ever tries to pry information

from my AA again, heads will roll.”

He paused to let his words sink in. “Do you understand me, Michael?”

Senator Wroth was dumbfounded. “I understand, Sam. I’ve just never heard you talk this way before. You’re usually so ... congenial.”

“Michael, you have never encountered me under a ‘code ten.’ I like you, son. I know you will go a long way. You’re only forty-nine, and you’ve got time. Skip this one for your own sake and forget it. I’m sorry. Good night.”

“Good night, Senator.”

Senator Wroth sat again in silence—this time thirty minutes. Finally, he called Marlene in.

“These guys are unbelievable. As tight-lipped as clams. Something big is up. Someone powerful, I mean really powerful, is in the game. Call Jake Simmons at the CIA and ask for a list of all the calls these senators received late yesterday afternoon. Find the numbers common to both offices and trace the owners. I want a name on my desk by seven tomorrow morning.”

*CIA? List of calls?* Marlene hesitated a moment in disbelief.

“You realize that what you’re asking is illegal, right?”

“Marlene, do I ever ask you to do something before I have weighed the risks? Just don’t get caught.”

Marlene’s thoughts raced.

“I’ll have it to you in the morning, sir.”

# THREE

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*Perhaps I have never put myself in a place where I need a miracle.  
Obediently I enter that place now.*

—Ruth Grant

**The chilly night air** rushed through the door as Christopher Owen closed it quickly and approached the pair awaiting him in the dimly lit corner of Common Grounds, a coffee shop near the university.

“Ah! Our diminutive leader, faithful chum, and stalwart co-collaborator graces us with his presence!” A growingly rotund John Steward stood and wrapped Christopher in a massive bear hug, lifting him off the ground.

Lanky Nicolas Fernandez arose and repeated the gesture. “Hey, buddy!”

Safely back on the ground, Christopher poked playfully at each of the men. The well-built, sandy-haired man could clearly hold his own.

“All right, guys ... make fun of my height. Have I ever told you Napoleon was only five-foot-six?”

“About a million times!” John laughed. “Do you need to compensate like he did by conquering the world?”

“Well, John,” Nic said, smiling, “Christopher is always telling us how he plans to see the Kingdom spread throughout the whole world!”

“Peacefully, guys, peacefully!” Christopher laughed. “Gandhi changed India as a pacifist. A five-foot-three pacifist, at that!”

“O esteemed one, do you keep a list of history’s greatest short people in your pocket?” John asked. “If I wrote down the names you’ve quoted since we were in college, they’d fill a notebook.”

Christopher grinned at his two best friends as he grabbed the cup of decaf they’d purchased for him. His blue eyes glistened. *Friends don’t come any better than this.*

“What’s wrong with you, Christopher, that you can’t handle real coffee at night?” John teased.

“Give it time, bro. You reach your thirties and things change. Caffeine insomnia’s gonna hit you just like it did Nic and me. When it does, we’ll see who’s laughing. I see that Nic is drinking decaf, but you haven’t said anything to him.”

“I chided him for his ignoble choice before you arrived,” John said. “By the way, O faithless one, did I tell you I found another famous five-foot-five person the other day? Curly Howard of the Three Stooges!”

“Woo-woo-woo-woo-woo!” Christopher slapped his face in his best Three Stooges imitation. “Now I know where I got my sense of humor. So, are we going to get down to business or continue discussing the merits of male height? I hereby call to order the meeting of the Three Amigos.”

“Yes, Mr. Intensity,” Nic chuckled, “let’s get down to business. We are both wondering why you called us here so late.”

“Guys, the Lord hasn’t let me sleep most nights this week. Something big is brewing. When we started Church in the City, we aimed at developing a Kingdom movement that would reach L.A. and the world. Something beyond ourselves, beyond our own church. Something to bless other churches. Something to reach the unreached.”

John and Renee Steward’s move to L.A. with Christopher and Chara a few years earlier was no less costly than the Owens’. Nic and Stacy Fernandez, already doing business in L.A., joined them right at the start. The three couples fit like lock and key.

Christopher could see John shifting nervously in his seat.

“You guys know the status of our work better than anyone.” Christopher sipped his coffee. “Frankly, I’m frustrated with our progress. Are we becoming a Kingdom movement? No! We need some major course corrections.”

“I’m game for whatever changes you wanna make, buddy,” Nic said. “In business, if we don’t keep improving and adapting, we’re history.”

John cleared his throat. “Hold on, Nic. It doesn’t take much encouragement for Christopher to jump at the next hare-brained idea. Christopher, I think we need a better grasp of the situation

before we get the rest of the community stirred up.”

“I agree with you, bro,” Christopher said. “That’s why I’ve asked you two to meet with me tonight. I need your gut-honest feedback. Your fingers are on the pulse of things as much as mine. Nic, you have the progress analysis?”

Nicolas, an entrepreneurial prodigy, located the appropriate spreadsheet on his tablet.

“The numbers arrived in record time from our IT whiz Timothy Wu. He confirms your hunch. We have started a large number of groups, but the members generally aren’t reproducing. We have become a ministry that attracts people rather than a movement that builds disciple-makers.”

Christopher signed deeply. “I knew it. I could feel it in my bones. We’ve settled into maintenance mode—marking time. That’s not what we signed up for when we started this venture.”

John, a professor of history at USC, objected. “It’s not that bad, Christopher. We’ve made quite a difference in just a few years. And what we’ve got is authentic.”

Christopher leaned back a bit and nodded, careful not to push too hard. “You’re right, bro. If that weren’t the case, nothing else would matter. It’s just that I think we’ve focused inwardly so much we’ve forgotten our outward task. Los Angeles was supposed to be just the starting point. Remember? Nic, tell him what you learned a couple of weeks ago.”

“About?”

“Three eras ...” prompted Christopher.

“Oh, right. Okay, so I’m taking the Perspectives class every Monday night. Dr. Ralph Winter summarized the modern missions movement into three distinct eras: the coastland era, the inland era, and the current era of unreached people groups. God’s plan to bring His Kingdom to all the peoples of the earth is unfolding at an accelerating pace, and it may be nearly done. What Christopher has been teaching us is right. If we can get the gospel to all the remaining *unengaged*, unreached people groups, the task Jesus described in Matthew 24:14 could be finished! *Finished!*”

Christopher watched John stiffen. “Nic,” the professor said, “do you have any idea how many unreached people groups there

are? Probably tens of thousands. There's a reason it has taken 2000 years."

Christopher cleared his throat. "Uh, bro. Actually we're getting pretty close. According to databases manned by Joshua Project and the International Mission Board, the grand total of unreached groups is down to around 6,800. The number varies a bit depending on how you slice them and which database you use, but that's pretty close. The good news is that most of these have someone actively trying to reach them, leaving only 3,227 of these unengaged."

Nic glanced at his tablet. "I have a list here with all the names and locations. That's 3,227 unreached people groups that are still *not* engaged by anyone with a church-planting strategy aimed at multiplying disciples and churches."

John arched an eyebrow. "Well, count me wrong, O learned ones. *Only* 3,227 unengaged groups." He smiled and brushed a crumb off his tweed jacket. "Piece of cake."

Christopher leaned forward again. He spoke in a whisper, and the others had to lean in to hear his words. "Do you realize what you just said, Nic? We have names! Locations! No previous generation has been able to quantify what remains of the task. You guys, if we can quantify it, we can finish it!"

He tapped his fingertips together as his two friends waited.

*Maybe it isn't a pipe dream after all. Maybe, just maybe ...* Words came slowly to Christopher's thoughts. "Guys, don't you see? We need to embrace a sense of urgency about fulfilling Jesus' last command to His church. These are His marching orders for the body of Christ—the quest of quests. With God's help, we can do this! But I need you. I need the brainstorming power and the lock-step front of the Three Amigos."

John leaned back, took a long sip of his coffee, and said, "Okay, okay! Let's assume you're right for a minute. What has to be solved?"

Christopher's soul was a volcano ready to erupt. "What's to solve?! Everything! Like, how can we finish the task? How can it happen in our generation? That is, how can we become the last generation in history?"

John pulled at his disheveled beard. "I don't know, but I do

know this. Renee's in the same class with Nic. She told me there have been over a thousand reach-the-world plans in history, and all have failed. What makes us think we'll succeed?"

"Because we must!" Christopher clapped his mug down on the table harder than he intended. Eyes turned his direction, but he was oblivious. "We must! Someone must finish this thing. Not finishing is unacceptable. There *must* be a way. The question is: How will we know when we are done?"

Nic said, "You mean metrics? How will we measure completion of the task?"

Christopher nodded. "Exactly. Paul the apostle faced this question in the eastern Roman Empire. In Romans 15 he announced his mission completed. After proclaiming Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum, Paul said, 'There is no more place for me to work in these regions.' His work there was done; there was no place left where people did not have access to the gospel. We must assault the gates of hell until there is *no place left!*"

Nic looked up. "No place left? That's a tall order."

Christopher said, "Even so, that is our mission objective."

Nic and John stared into their cups while they digested this.

Christopher leaned forward and whispered, "No place left! Come on, guys. This is the type of thing we signed on for!" He extended both hands for fist bumps. "Don't leave me hanging."

Nic smiled broadly and pounded his fist. John shook his head and did the same. "Okay, okay. I'm along for the ride with you two headstrong bucks, if for no other reason than to keep your feet on the ground."

Christopher smirked. "Now that's what I'm talking about. Three intrepid heroes marching toward Mount NoPlaceLeft."

"Or Mount Doom." John raised an eyebrow and tugged at his beard. "Well, you are hobbit sized. Maybe you won't be noticed."

Nic slapped John on the back. "Don't be so gloomy, buddy. 'No place left.' I like it. It forces us to start with the end result and find a path that'll get there. Hey, what if we set a date by which we aim for 'no place left,' a date that forces us to operate differently or fail trying? It has to be a date that forces us into a paradigm perhaps never before envisioned."

Christopher stirred in his seat. His heart began racing.



“You may have something there, bro. What’s a reasonable date that would force us into approaching this in a new way?”

Nic scratched his head. “I don’t know. 2050? 2040?”

Christopher said, “No way. Dates that far off still allow us to relax—business as usual.”

They looked silently into their mugs for a minute.

“What about 2025?” said the tweed-clad teddy bear. “That’s ten years from now. A lot can happen in ten years, but only if we radically alter course.”

Christopher’s eyes widened. “Professor Steward. You, the skeptic, proposing the most ambitious date?”

“Ahem.” The academic dabbed some foam from his beard. “As a student of history, unlike you two ne’er-do-wells, I have the advantage of hindsight. I’ve rarely seen the type of course corrections you’re describing without drastic, almost draconian, measures. I’m not advocating this date, but offering it as perhaps the only option to accomplish what you are describing—academically-speaking, that is!”

Christopher grinned. John talked tough but was with them heart and soul.

Christopher placed a napkin on the table and wrote: *2025 AD, 3,227 groups, and No Place Left.*

“Okay, guys, 3,227 groups to reach in just ten years. Progress is being made, but current momentum won’t get us there that soon. A goal of the year 2025 forces a radical shift forward in momentum. What will it take for us to finish by then? How do we find the answers?”

“Well, I’m no academic,” Nic said, shooting a glance at John, “but as an entrepreneur, I look for models and case studies that demonstrate the breakthrough I need. What if I contact several missions agencies to find out what good models are out there for this type of venture? *Mission Frontiers* has also had some good articles recently on models of multiplying churches.”

Christopher wrote *case studies* and *Mission Frontiers* on the napkin. The tension in the pit of his stomach began to uncoil. “Okay, bro, you start checking that out. What else?”

“We’d be foolhardy not to examine history to extrapolate out momentum shifts of this endeavor over the last two millennia,”

John said. “That should reveal some clues about necessary course corrections.”

Christopher laughed. “Uh, John, you know, you really need a pipe in your hand. You go ahead and work that angle.” Christopher added *lessons from history* to his napkin.

“Timothy and I will contact the agencies that provided the databases for the 3,227 groups. I imagine their leaders have already wrestled with this problem. I will also send out feelers to friends who might have other leads. Listen, guys, think outside the box. Ask radical questions. Perhaps the fact that we work in different fields will lead us to innovative solutions. Follow every credible lead. Remember, we’re the Three Amigos!”

John coughed. “Or perhaps the Three Stooges.”

Christopher smiled. “I’ll ignore that. Let’s meet again in a week to compare notes. No more business as usual.”

Nic pounded the table. “You got it, buddy. Let’s get to work. We’re burning daylight!”

John droned, “Uh, Nic. You do realize it’s 11 p.m., right?”

“Never too early to start!”

John said, “Seriously, though, gentlemen. Do you realize where this could lead?” He shifted uneasily. “Questions like this can stir up a hornet’s nest. The Christian establishment is pretty comfortable. And when professors challenge the status quo, we can get marginalized and branded as quacks.”

Nic slapped him on the back again. “Come on, John. That’s a risk we have to take. The payoff is too big.”

Christopher paused and admired his fellow adventurers. No reason to worry. These two guys knew how to course correct each other, and him, too. He waited for a moment, then said, “If we pull this off, we could be the last generation—the one Jesus described in Matthew 24!”

Nic drained his coffee and stood. “All right, buddies. Much as I enjoy dreaming with you, I’ve got to go. Power breakfast downtown in the morning.”

“And an eight o’clock class here. I’ll walk out with you. Right honorable colleagues, I salute thee.” John raised his cup, finished his drink, and wiped his beard.

Christopher laughed and saluted them with his mug.

“I’m gonna stay and do a bit more praying and journaling. Let’s bathe this in prayer over the next few days.” He smiled as the door closed behind them. They were in.

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Out in the cool night air, Nic threw his arm around John’s shoulder and nodded toward Common Grounds.

“That guy’s crazy, you know.”

“I know.”

“I don’t know how he keeps the pace he does. Seems like he can accomplish more in a week than most of us can in a month.”

“Yeah,” John said. He buttoned his coat to combat the chill wind. “Sometimes he scares me. But I’ve known him since our freshman year in college. Trust me, we’re entering a new phase. The ride will be exhilarating—and exhausting!”

Nic slapped him on the back once more.

“Buddy, I’ve launched and sold businesses since I was about seventeen. I’ve negotiated deals worth millions. But nothing I’ve done compares to what our friend is proposing. I didn’t want to discourage him. But, just between us, do you think it’s possible to finish by 2025?”

John stopped in his tracks and arched an eyebrow at his friend. “I thought you possessed a visage of bronze, impervious to risk, drinking from an endless well of optimism, my friend.”

Nic looked down at his toes. “Not impervious, John. No one is. I know when risk is perilous. The upside of this venture is limitless, but the downside is—well—fatal.”

John now wrapped his arm across Nic’s shoulders. “Humph. Maybe I’m not the best one to ask. I give Christopher a hard time, always have. But look at how far we’ve come since we started Church in the City, even spawning two other churches and multiplying many disciples and groups.

“It’s nothing short of amazing, but Christopher doesn’t see it—the progress, that is. He doesn’t hear the accolades from others or give attention to the many requests to join the speaking circuit. He only sees what remains of the task—the gap. It drives him. It always has. Have you ever seen the quote Christopher has taped to the back of his desk?”

Nic shook his head.

“He doesn’t like to parade it. It’s worn and tattered now, and he keeps putting Scotch tape on it to keep it from tearing more.

“It’s from the man who preached Christopher’s ordination message. That old saint planted dozens of churches along the bayous of French Louisiana and, as an eighty-year-old, taught Christopher in Sunday School.

“As he spoke that night, he pointed a finger at Christopher and said, ‘I just love young preacher-boys, because they don’t know what God can’t do.’

“*That’s* what’s taped to Christopher’s desk. Limitless, Bible-based faith. It’s something he has vowed to never outgrow. Naive sometimes, but always full of faith. I try to keep him grounded in reality and guard him however I can. But heaven forbid if I douse his faith.”

John pulled out his keys and unlocked his car door. He turned and stared Nic in the eyes. “Is it possible? With other men, I’m not sure. But Christopher Owen might just pull it off. He sees no reason God can’t do it.” He sat down and strapped himself in. “Fasten your seatbelt. I don’t think we’re stopping till there is no place left.”

John started his engine and drove off. Nic jumped and fist-pumped the air. “Yes! I knew it!”

# FOUR

---

**Senator Wroth** might have been there all night. All Marlene knew was that he was still at the office when she finally left around midnight, and he was there when she returned early the next morning to finish her report.

*Doesn't he ever sleep?* Marlene finished her report, then waited until seven before gently knocking on his door. He looked as if he had rested, showered, shaved, and dressed in a fresh suit.

"Good morning, Marlene. Tell me what we've got."

"Good morning, sir. Jake Simmons said it was simple to get the numbers of all the calls. There was only one number that matched, besides, of course, our own calls to the senators. But the calls came from a public phone in Italy. I'm afraid we're at a dead end."

"We're never at a dead end. If the caller made an international call, he had to pay for it somehow. Check the Italian phone company's record to see how it was billed. Use Jake again. He owes me a lot of favors. Track the records as far as they will go. I know we're bending the rules a little, but we can't tolerate some outside force, perhaps an international one, having such strong influence on American policy making. And if we try to pursue traditional legal avenues, we will probably get nowhere."

Another aide burst into the office and thrust the morning's Washington Post into Senator Wroth's hands. Pasted across the front were pictures of two senators with a blaring headline: "TWO SENATORS KILLED OVERNIGHT, SIX DEAD."

Senator Wroth suppressed a gasp as he scanned the first article. Senator Hansen had been found knifed to death with his senior administrative assistant, Anita Burdette. They had stopped by a well-respected bar after a long day on Capitol Hill. After leaving the establishment, the two were apparently victims of a random mugging. Their money and credit cards had been taken, along with other valuables. Police speculated that the two

the investigators had little to go on.

A second article said that Senator Spears and three aides were on a private Learjet en route to his constituency in California when the plane lost altitude over Colorado. All four, along with the pilot and co-pilot, were killed instantly. The NTSB had no clues yet regarding the cause of the crash, but all possibilities were being investigated, including foul play. Colorado officials were cooperating fully, but heavy snowfall was hampering access to the wreckage site near Castle Peak.

Senator Wroth was silent, his face pale.

This was no coincidence.

Marlene felt the need to sit.

"This is a sad day for America," Senator Wroth said, escorting the junior aide to the door. "See that the rest of the staff know."

"Marty Spears was a good friend," he said to Marlene after the door closed. "We passed the bar together in California and began our political careers about the same time. He told me yesterday that this was too big for me. Well, we're going to find out how big. There's a link all right, and we're going to find it. Call a press conference for eleven o'clock. In the meantime, get the chief of police over to meet with me. Then patch me through to whoever is heading up the investigation into the plane crash. Get them on the line after I talk to the chief."

"Yes, Senator."

Marlene gathered her notes. It was going to be a long day.

\* \* \*

Chief Willie Merrill arrived at Senator Wroth's office around 8:30. Marlene ushered him in and left them alone. Senator Wroth stepped forward, hand extended.

"Thank you for coming, Chief. Your office must be a madhouse right now."

"Yes, sir. We are swamped with the investigation into Senator Hansen's death. I would be happy to drop by another time to visit, but today I can't spare much time. However, my wife did ask me to thank you for the bottle of champagne you sent for our twenty-fifth anniversary. She couldn't believe you remembered."

"It was nothing. Please have a seat, Willie. This will only take

a minute, and I hope it can help your investigation. Are we off the record?"

"Absolutely, Senator. Do you know something?"

Senator Wroth poured the chief some coffee and escorted him to a sofa.

"Senator Hansen and I were fairly close. In many ways he was my mentor. Senator Spears and I were also quite good friends going all the way back to law school. And, of course, we were both senators from California. Honestly, it's hard to believe their deaths were just coincidental."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but just because you knew them both well doesn't exactly link them together."

"Oh, you're quite right," Senator Wroth replied with good-natured surprise. "I haven't given you the connecting details. Actually, something happened just yesterday that makes me think this wasn't a coincidence."

Senator Wroth hesitated as if searching for what to say. "The three of us were all set to vote yesterday morning against the Free Trade bill. According to our count it would lose, but it would be close—fifty-one against, forty-nine for. But when the vote was taken, both Senator Hansen and Senator Spears reversed their position, and the bill won fifty-one to forty-nine."

"I have to admit I was angry. We had all fought hard to block the loss of American jobs through this bill. I got a little fiery and confronted each of the senators privately. They both told me in no uncertain terms that someone they feared had pressured them to reverse their votes, but they wouldn't tell me who it was. Frankly, Chief, this was out of character for both men."

"They wouldn't say who it was, sir?"

Wroth said, "Not a word. But it sounded as if someone had really scared them. We're both off the record, right?"

The chief nodded.

"These men were my friends, and I smell a rat. I'm going to hold a press conference in a couple of hours to express my condolences and assure the American public that I will do all I can to see that these deaths are investigated thoroughly."

"I won't disclose any evidence you have, Chief, but I would appreciate knowing as much as possible so that I can speak

lightly to the situation. The death of two out of one hundred senators in one evening is a grave blow to America, let alone their staffs! Have you discovered anything that could indicate the deaths were premeditated?"

The chief was visibly encouraged. In a world full of reluctant witnesses, he was pleased that the senator, and perhaps even the entire Senate, was going to cooperate.

"Well, sir, I can't say anything regarding Senator Spears's death—that's out of my jurisdiction. And, of course, any information about Senator Hansen is strictly confidential. But there was something very curious in Senator Hansen's death. Wadded up in his closed fist was a note, 'Never betray a code ten!' But we have no idea what a 'code ten' is.

"None of the reporters saw the note in Senator Hansen's fist, so to them this is just another mugging. Did Senator Hansen mention anything to you about a 'code ten,' sir?"

Senator Wroth took another sip of coffee before responding, his brow furrowed slightly. "No, not that I can recall. What do you think it means?"

"We haven't the foggiest. The note could be pointing to a premeditated assault, but with nothing more to go on, it's going to be difficult to treat this as anything more than a mugging."

"It may be just as well that the public thinks it was random for now. I hope this was helpful. And thank you for coming over here discreetly; I didn't want to create the wrong impression by going down to the police station and all."

"No, Senator, it was better for me to come here. Don't worry about this conversation. If we need to follow up, I'll call you privately, or you can call me."

The senator walked the chief to the door.

"I won't say anything about the note in my press conference. Good luck in your investigation."

\* \* \*

The conversation with the chief investigator assigned to Senator Spears's plane crash wasn't much different.

"We didn't see it at first, sir. It snowed lightly after the crash, obscuring the site. Wreckage from the plane was strewn over



several hundred yards. After an hour of walking Castle Peak, one of my investigators noticed that someone had written 'CODE TEN' in three-foot block letters in the snow. We found the body of one of the pilots near the writing, so he may have been trying to signal for help, but if so he was apparently delirious. Whoever heard of a 'code ten'?"

The senator thanked the investigator and told him the same things he had told Chief Merrill about both senators being pressured by someone they feared into changing their votes. He also recommended that the investigator talk to Chief Merrill.

\* \* \*

Senator Wroth's eleven o'clock press conference was perfectly timed. The news had spread, and all of America was in shock. Senator Wroth was the first senator to speak publicly on the two deaths. And eight o'clock Pacific Time suited his California constituency perfectly. Senator Wroth had a gift for connecting with his audience emotionally while communicating wise tenacity in pursuing justice. He kept his comments brief. First, he expressed his deepest sorrow at the deaths of his two friends. Then he promised that his office and hopefully the U.S. Senate would ensure the deaths were investigated thoroughly. Finally, he assured those listening that any wrongdoing would be dealt with swiftly.

Questions followed.

"Senator Wroth, do you have any idea if the crash or the mugging was premeditated?"

"Well, honestly, it's too early to tell. I have no evidence one way or the other, and, as you can imagine, I am not privy to the confidential investigations."

"But do you have any evidence on this case or know of any developments at this point?" another reporter asked.

"Nancy, as I mentioned, I'm just a senator, and I don't have any evidence. That's the job of the investigators. My offers of assistance have reassured me that both investigations are being pursued thoroughly."

"So, you have talked to the investigators?"

"These two senators were close friends of mine. I was deeply

have talked to the investigators in Washington and Colorado, not to interfere but to offer any assistance I can.”

“Sir, what kind of assistance could a senator offer the police and NTSB investigations?”

“That remains to be seen. I have to run. I am meeting with the governor of California today to discuss the appointment of a new senator. Tough as it will be to replace Senator Spears, it must be done. The people of California need another voice to join me in guiding America. Thank you.”

Senator Wroth and his entourage exited the podium confident the public felt reassured that matters were in good hands.

Back at his office, Marlene awaited Senator Wroth.

“Great press conference, Senator!” She looked up from some documents. “By the way, both those calls were billed to the same Italian credit card, but the account was then closed with no trace of a name, address, or other identifying information.”

Senator Wroth seemed almost pleased, as if he were expecting such news.

“This guy is good, and he’s still a step ahead of us. But we’re going to nail him. No one is going to take out two U.S. Senators without consequences.”

“Sir, don’t you think we should notify the CIA?”

“Not just yet. There’s no telling who’s involved in this. We have the resources to carry out a swift investigation of our own and possibly get more critical, time-sensitive information than the normal bureaucracy. We can’t afford to let this lag. We need to operate quickly and quietly.

“Marlene, we politicians think we’re powerful because we shake our sticks at people and they run. But this guy is smarter. Somehow he’s been working behind the scenes for decades with great restraint. Hansen said he had encountered a ‘code ten’ only four times, and he served over forty years. Spears got a similar call fourteen years ago—one call! This guy doesn’t intervene often, just at critical points.”

Senator Wroth continued as if teaching Marlene deep and important truths. “This guy may have already been strategizing while we were in diapers. His strength is his patience and his

see and snap to. But this guy's power is much deeper. He influences people without being seen—that's real power. To nab him we'll need to remain behind the scenes ourselves and try to catch him unawares."

The two sat in silence for a moment before Senator Wroth returned to the task at hand.

"Have Simmons fly to Rome where he can handle the investigation directly. Have him use the special projects account to flash a lot of money around quietly at the Italian credit card company. Someone's bound to talk over there. Then work through your network with the other AAs on Capitol Hill to see if they've ever had a 'code ten' call. But be inconspicuous and offhand about it. They mustn't suspect anything."

"How much cash do I have to work with?" Marlene inquired.

The senator paused for a moment.

"Offer Simmons as much as he needs—no cap. And, Marlene, I want you to accompany me to San Francisco to meet with the governor this evening about appointing someone to fill Spears's position. We'll leave here at three."

"San Francisco? Not Sacramento?"

"The governor wants to meet quietly, off-the-record, at Dr. Larson Sayers's office," he explained.

"Dr. Larson Sayers? *The* Dr. Larson Sayers?"

Senator Wroth was visibly pleased at Marlene's response.

As Marlene was closing the door behind her, Senator Wroth called her back in. "One more thing, Marlene," he said, with just a hint of concern. "Ask Simmons to have one of his experts check our jet over thoroughly."

\* \* \*

Jake Simmons arrived at the airport with his technical expert around 1 p.m. to scour the Bombardier Challenger 850 for any tampering. Bryce was good; if something were amiss, he would find it.

"Holy cow!"

Simmons ran to the nose of the 850, where Bryce was examining the front landing gear.

"Look at that!" Bryce exclaimed.

“What is it?”

Bryce handed Simmons a flashlight. “Shine that up into the landing gear assembly. The metal bolt has been replaced with a plastic replica. It looks fine but won’t hold up under pressure.”

“So, what does that do? Does it prevent the landing gear from deploying?” asked Jake.

“No way! That would flash a warning signal to the pilot, who could then retract the gear and try a belly landing. Nope, whoever set this up is a lot smarter than that. This bolt normally locks the gear down during landing. But without a metal bolt the landing gear wouldn’t hold up during impact. The wheels would deploy, the pilot would land, and the front gear would buckle.”

Moments later Bryce continued, “And look here. The same bolt was replaced on the back right gear, but not on the left. So the front and right wheel supports would collapse while the left gear would stay extended. The plane would swerve out of control and spin on the runway like a drunk—with a high probability of loss of life.”

“Can you fix it?”

“Give me half an hour.”

Bryce twisted the fake bolts loose.

“Hmm, it’s hard to see under the grease stain, but this looks like the manufacturer’s name: C-O-D-E T-E-N. ‘Code ten’? Huh, never heard of it.” He tossed the bolts to Simmons. “Souvenir for the senator.”

\* \* \*

Marlene was thrilled to accompany Senator Wroth to the meeting with Dr. Sayers at his suite atop the Bay Mist Tower.

Although the reception area sported magnificent views of San Francisco, Marlene was more interested in the interior decor. *Well decorated, but not ostentatious. Surprisingly modest for a man of his stature.* While the receptionist prepared their coffees, Marlene walked around admiring Sayers’s photos—a private audience with the Pope; at the negotiating table with Arab and Israeli leaders; bottle feeding a famished infant in Somalia; relaxing at Camp David with the president; a private meeting with the Dalai Lama and the premier of China; and weeping with

in the Balkans. *No wonder people love Dr. Sayers.*

The senator and Marlene were escorted to a comfortable sitting area where they greeted the governor and his aides. Marlene noted Senator Wroth's subdued excitement as he spotted a short, balding man sitting inconspicuously in the background.

Dr. Sayers rose swiftly. "Hello, Michael, it's been too long."

Senator Wroth walked quickly to Dr. Sayers, shook his hand, and then hugged him as if he were family.

Marlene was floored, as was the governor.

"I see you know each other," the governor said.

"I've known Michael's family all his life, Governor."

"Known us? Uncle Lars, er ... Dr. Sayers and my mother were childhood friends. He frequently joined us on family vacations. He's like an uncle to me."

"It has been a long time though, hasn't it?" Senator Wroth added, turning to Dr. Sayers.

"Yes, Michael, the last twenty-five years have been rather busy for both of us. You have become quite influential. Your father would be proud of you."

"You're being modest," the senator responded warmly. "You're the one who has been busy. Everywhere I turn, you are inspiring decision-makers toward peace. I've never understood how you do it. How do you see past disagreements to help guide opposing parties to agreeable solutions?"

"That's why I requested this meeting, Michael," the governor said. "We need Dr. Sayers's wisdom in this moment of crisis. But we only have a sixty-minute window, so if you don't mind, let's get started."

The three men and their aides sat at the mahogany table to discuss who should succeed Senator Spears for the remainder of his term. Many options were considered, with the governor and the senator generally in disagreement. Differences in ideology were reviewed. Prospects for re-election after Senator Spears's term ended were examined. One by one, leading contenders were eliminated as too divisive, too conservative, too ambitious. As the meeting progressed, one name rose to the top—Representative Philip Bowen. Neither the governor nor the

Bowen became the preferred choice for both.

“Well then, Bowen it is,” the governor said, tired but satisfied. “We’ll run a brief background check, and I’ll talk with him personally to see if he’ll accept the position.”

“He’ll accept, Governor,” Senator Wroth said. “Philip is eager to serve in a larger capacity. He’s itching to get into the senate.”

Dr. Sayers stood, signaling that the meeting was over. “Gentlemen, I think you’ve made a wise decision,” he said. “Now if you will excuse me, I must prepare for my trip to Benghazi tomorrow. Stay as long as you like. My assistant will wait and lock up behind you.”

Dr. Sayers shook everyone’s hand and gave Senator Wroth another quick hug before departing.

# FIVE

---

*I can't shake the feeling that I was destined  
for something extraordinary, something history-changing.  
The shouts of the ordinary—  
the mundane, the self-focused, the trivial—  
try to drown out the gentle call of the upward quest.  
Oh, retune my ears to hear!*

—Ruth Grant

**“Thanks for staying up** for me,” Christopher said as he got into bed, where Chara was fighting to keep her eyes open.

“I couldn’t wait to hear how your meeting with Nic and John went. So many of our hopes and dreams seem to hang in the balance.” She yawned. “So they gave you helpful feedback?”

“More than you could imagine. In the abundance of counselors there is victory, and those guys are good counselors. They help me think in fresh ways. I mean, Nic’s idea of simply setting a deadline was pivotal. And when John proposed 2025, I nearly fell out of my seat.”

Chara snuggled up to him and pulled the blanket tighter.

“Honey, I forgot to tell you one more interesting tidbit from our Perspectives class,” she said. “Get this—last year one major evangelical denomination spent 215 million dollars in *interest alone* on church debt. It makes me so mad. There are so many better things to do with that money!”

Her breathing soon indicated that she was falling asleep, even though she continued to mumble, “... so mad. Makes me so mad.”

Christopher stared at the ceiling, replaying the evening’s conversation in his mind. Sweat formed on his brow despite the chill in the room. He shuddered. *God, what am I getting us into?*

He slipped out of bed and tiptoed down the stairs of their deteriorating hundred-year-old Tudor home. Guided by the moonlight streaming through the living room window, he

reached his study, carefully navigating lines of dominoes the kids had meticulously set up.

The night sounds clamored louder than usual. Christopher cocked his head in thought. *First I dragged my family to the inner city—well, not dragged. They came eagerly, but I’m still responsible. Now I’m dragging them into the final generation—the Revelation generation. What idiocy! I can just hear my kids in a few years, “Gee, Dad, thanks for letting us walk through fire and tribulation.”*

Christopher shivered again, flung the quilt away, and dropped to the floor. *Crank out thirty diamond push-ups. That should do it.*

Twenty-one was all he could manage. *When did that happen? Exhaustion must be robbing my energy.* Slowly he pulled himself up and collapsed on the love seat.

He pulled out his Bible and journal and began writing: *Is it really possible to fulfill Matthew 24:14? Is it possible to get to the point of “no place left”? Or I’m just delusional? Surely this time I’m in over my head. The guys see the faith-filled Christopher. But they can’t peer into my soul to see that my every faith venture is plagued by self-incriminating doubts.*

Christopher paused and waited on the Lord. He sensed the Holy Spirit guiding him once more to the familiar passage: “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God?”

“Oh, Lord,” Christopher whispered, “what would it take for our generation to hasten the day? Can we really do it? Am I ready to pay the price?”

He put his pen down and began pacing, running his fingers through his hair.

*Yes. You’ve guided me deliberately down this path. Father, give us a clear plan toward the end-vision of every nation, every tribe, every people and language knowing and worshipping You. Why has it taken us two thousand years?*

Christopher picked up his phone and tweeted:

**1000 finish-the-task plans in 2000 yrs all fell short of no place left (Rm 15:23). What can we do to finish by 2025? #NoPlaceLeft2025**



As he sent the tweet into cyberspace, he shot a desperate prayer into heaven. Gunshots rang out nearby. He lay on the love seat in a fetal position. *Gunshots? Drive-by shootings? It's gonna get a lot worse than this.*

He couldn't sleep on the love seat again. The crick in his neck from previous nights of insomnia still screamed its objection. He tiptoed back into the living room. A police car shot down his street, lights flashing, siren silent.

Christopher carefully dodged the lines of dominoes, though several floorboards announced his steps. He crept back upstairs and into bed, where Chara snuggled next to him again. He stared into the darkness, praying for responses to his tweet that would unravel the mystery and perhaps set the quest in motion. He prayed he would have the strength to complete their new quest.

Downstairs he heard a rhythmic clickety-clack invading the silence. Christopher sat upright. Chara stirred beside him.

"What was that?"

"Oh, nothing. The dominoes have just started falling."

# SIX

---

**The data analyst** printed a report and called to his supervisor.

“Yes, Greely?” Number Eight strutted over.

“Sir, we intercepted an email reply to a tweet from Los Angeles. It references two Priority E items and one Priority A item.”

“Priority A, is it?”

“Yes, sir. I would not have disturbed you otherwise, sir.” Greely shifted nervously.

“You ran a background check on the referenced items?” Number Eight took the report and studied it.

“Yes, sir,” said Greely. “I have never encountered a Priority A item before, sir, but I think I handled it correctly.”

“Relax, Greely. You have done good work.” Number Eight glanced again at the report. “Just as I expected. The items have been quietly suppressed. I doubt anyone will care about either of the Priority E items, but it wouldn’t matter much if they do. And all records of the Priority A item have been thoroughly erased. Excellent—carry on!”

“B-b-but, sir?” Greely hesitantly objected.

Number Eight eyed him with disdain.

“What is it, Greely?”

“Sir, don’t you think we should inform Number Three?”

Number Eight coughed.

“How long have you been with us, Greely?”

“Five years, sir.”

“Quite right. You are still green. And didn’t your father work with us before you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I am surprised your father did not educate you better. A good man he was. Quiet. Diligent. Punctual. If he were here, he would tell you we do not inform Number Three of such trivial matters. We are quite capable of handling them.”

“But sir, this is a Priority A item. It should ...”

“Exactly my point, Greely. Being a Priority A item, it received Priority A attention from Number Three ...” he consulted the report in his hand, “exactly seventeen years ago. You see, Greely, when we act, we act thoroughly and unobtrusively. Number Three is the best there is. No loose ends. Period. Carry on.”

Greely returned to his workstation and tried to put the affair out of his mind. He felt unsettled that the email was somehow missing any indication of who sent it. Theoretically this couldn't happen, but somehow it had. No matter. If Number Eight said it was taken care of, it must be. He turned toward the monitor and continued scanning reports.

# SEVEN

---

*Some generation will be the last generation,  
the one that sees Your glorious return.  
It will be a generation of your people  
willing to lay down their lives without reservation.  
Let my life be a catalyst for such a generation!*

—Ruth Grant

**Christopher's feet returned** to the ground as John released him from another bear hug. "Hail, O fearless captain!"

Nic grabbed their coffee mugs and laughed. He led John and Christopher to a warm corner of Common Grounds.

As they followed, John slung an arm across Christopher's shoulders. "Hey, I found another five-foot-five compadre for you—Harry Houdini. Only you're not escaping our questions tonight. We've got more than a few knots for you to untie."

"Is that right? Houdini? Good company."

"You're dodging my meaning."

"Exactly!" Christopher winked. "By the way, guys, Lawrence of Arabia was only five-foot-six, and look at what he achieved!"

"That's it, hand it over," John said. "I'm ready to burn that list of yours!"

"Come on, buddy" urged Nic. "I want to hear more about what you've been texting us. It's driving me crazy. And the email you forwarded is especially intriguing. Why would someone send it anonymously, and how could they even do that?"

The three settled into plush armchairs.

"Now let me get this straight, Christopher," said John. "You got an anonymous response to your inquiry, and there's no way to track down who sent it?"

"Tweet, John, not inquiry. Inquiry sounds so academic."

John squared his shoulders. "Tweet, twit, email, whatever. I don't care how it was sent."

Nic pulled out his device. “Back to the email. No way to track it down?”

Christopher shook his head. “Timothy says it is impossible to send an untraceable email, but he sees no way to track this one to the source. If he can’t track down the sender, I know I can’t.”

Once more Nic read the email’s three short phrases:

***Roland Allen: Various works***

***A.T. Pierson: Turn-of-the-twentieth-century missions mobilizer***

***M.J. Livermore: Dissertation, Franklin College, Ely, UK***

He looked up from his tablet. “Buddy, this could just be some wild goose chase. Sounds pretty cryptic.”

“Yeah, I thought about that, but the first item turned out to be a gold mine. Roland Allen was way ahead of his time. His books go in and out of print and can be hard to find and expensive, but the Kindle version of *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* was just one dollar!”

“What did he have to say?” Nic asked.

“Allen made some radical proposals that turned conventional missions thinking on its head and infuriated the Christian establishment at home and abroad. Kinda like what you said, John, about professors who challenge the status quo. He was sidelined and branded a quack.”

John tugged at his ear and cleared his throat. “Hmm, so of course you’re attracted to him.”

Christopher toasted him. “Touché.”

John took a swig of his coffee. “If he’s been branded a quack, why listen to him?”

“That was a hundred years ago,” Christopher said. “He even wrote that it would be fifty years before his views would be widely accepted, but he was optimistic. It took seventy years. But as his ideas have been taking root, the result has been nothing less than multiple church-planting movements.”

“Wait a minute,” John said. “You’ve been texting about this all week. Remind me again what a church-planting *movement* is.”

Christopher shifted in his seat and began gesturing with his

hands. “Well, reproducible simple communities of believers are launched in a region. Then these new disciples are given the vision, equipping, and encouragement to grow in their faith and simultaneously take the gospel to other places. When they do, they use the methods they were taught to start new groups every few weeks or months. These churches meet in homes, under trees, in storefronts, wherever. In time the gospel saturates the area. The King assumes His rightful reign. Since these movements produce successive generations of new churches, they are called *church-planting movements*, or *CPMs*.”

Nic leaned forward in his chair. “John, it seems that over the last fifteen years CPMs have been really growing in number. Many of them originated in Asia—places like China and India. This is the best model I’ve found yet for completing our quest.”

Christopher sipped his triple, tall, decaf Americano. “Amigos, we have a lot of learning ahead of us. I’m going to start reading all I can on this.”

Nic gave John a knowing look but spoke to Christopher. “From what I’ve read, this isn’t something you can learn just by reading a book. You need to taste and feel it, and learn from CPM practitioners.”

“And Nic’s got the perfect place to do that, or that’s what he is telling me,” said John.

“What would you and Chara think about going to Singapore with Stacy and me for a two-week training?” Nic asked.

“What?!”

“Listen, buddy,” Nic said. “I’ve asked around about where to be trained in CPM methods, and the best course seems to be hosted in Singapore. Stacy and I have discussed it with John and Renee. I have more frequent flier miles on my company credit card than I can use before they expire. Unless I use them to fly us all to Singapore, they’ll go to waste.”

“Guys, I don’t know...”

“You really should do it,” John urged. “There are plenty of church growth conferences in America, but we aren’t seeing the kind of movements here that you and Nic are talking about. We all know about the explosion of believers in places like China. I think it’s time for the Western world to learn from Asia.”

“You have a good point, and who wouldn’t love to go to Singapore? But what about the kids? What about the church? Chara would never go for it.”

“O ye of little faith. Chara has already started packing. Renee and I can hold things together at church for a few weeks,” John announced with finality.

“You’re not that indispensable, buddy,” Nic added with a grin, “and we’re taking the kids to Singapore, too.”

Christopher shook his head and wrote *Singapore—Owens & Fernandezes* on a napkin.

“Well, it appears I have no choice. I have been outvoted by you *and* our wives. One nice thing about substitute teaching is that I can always take time off.”

He took a sip of coffee, trying to hide his Cheshire-cat grin in the mug. *I’ve never had a poker face!* He screwed on his serious face again. “John, what have you learned from looking into the history?”

“I’ve done an initial search for factors that have increased or decreased momentum toward bringing the gospel to the entire world. I’m just in the preliminary stages, but I think I can help with item number two in the cryptic message: A.T. Pierson: Turn-of-the-twentieth-century missions mobilizer. And, by the way, I used real books from a real, musty library. You know, those things with leather on the outside and leaves of paper on the inside.”

Christopher threw a napkin at him. “Okay, wise-guy.”

“I discovered some exciting yet disturbing things about the response to Pierson’s initiative. He endeavored in the waning years of the nineteenth century to build collaboration to finish evangelizing the world by 1900. This led to global conferences and a lot of new initiatives.”

“Wow! That’s fascinating!” Christopher was on the edge of his seat. “Someone before us had the same idea of proposing a specific date for reaching the world! What happened?”

John hesitated. He stroked his beard several times.

“The glamour waned,” he said solemnly. “There was a lot of talk, but less activity. Prosperity had set in. When it came right down to it, not enough people wanted to make the sacrifices

necessary to make it happen. The year 1900 came and went. Pierson kept trying to rally others, and the increased momentum continued well into the next century, but this ‘Student Volunteer Movement’ eventually died out.”

Christopher leaned back and threw up his hands. “So the whole thing was a bust?”

“Oh no! A hundred thousand young people offered themselves for service to the nations. Twenty thousand went while the others supported them.”

Nic asked, “So it worked, but then the effort dissipated?”

John nodded and continued. “A similar effort developed in the lead-up to 2000 AD, and this effort got us even farther down the path. But still it has not resulted in mobilizing the whole Church to finish the whole task. And more than three thousand unreached people groups are still unengaged—waiting for those in our *comfortable* churches to take the good news to the *uncomfortable* places.”

Christopher stood up, paced a few times, and then plopped back down. Heads turned. “Wow! Two previous pushes have carried us many times around the track in this 2000 year long race. The finish line is in sight! The final lap is ready to be run.”

“That’s true, Christopher,” John said. “But listen to what I said. The groups left to reach are also the *hardest* to reach, and much of the Church is asleep. We let the possibility of finishing by 2000 pass us by because we enjoyed our creature comforts more than the Creator’s call. Will 2025 be any different?”

Christopher whipped out his phone and tapped out a tweet:

**3000+ unengaged unreached people groups. The finish line is in sight! Who will run the LAST LAP with us?  
#NoPlaceLeft2025**

“That settles it, Chris,” Nic said. “We *have* to go to Singapore.”

Christopher picked up the email printout. “What about this last item? M.J. Livermore. Any leads, bro?”

Nic swallowed. “That’s been a tough one. It took me a while to track down a number for Franklin College. It’s near London, just a shadow of its former self.

“I finally managed to reach the library to request a copy of



the dissertation, but apparently the college still lives in the nineteenth century. I fancy myself a pretty good negotiator, but I may have met my match in this old British librarian. Mrs. Goodenough told me that they don't do loans, they don't make copies, and they don't disclose their dissertation titles. I even got our charming professor here to call as a distinguished academic, but she shut him down as well."

John winced. "Yeah, that one wounded my ego a bit! The bottom line is, if you want to read that dissertation you're going to have to read it in her library, under her watchful eye. And she probably walks around with a ruler in her hand! I knew a few of those kind at Cambridge."

"So that got us thinking," John said, with a knowing glance at Nic. "You already have me standing in for you at church. And Nic and Stacy will be with you in Singapore and can bring your kids back, so ..."

He and Nic both leaned forward and said, "Wait for it . . .!" John made a drum roll on the table with his coffee stirrers.

Nic beamed. "We think you and Chara should continue around the world for a little honeymoon in England. We've already checked with Chara, and she likes the idea."

Christopher sat back in his chair, a bemused smile on his face.

"Man, how much conspiring goes on behind my back? Guess I can't say no?"

They both shook their heads. "Why would you?" John added.

Christopher laughed. "Well, if that dissertation at Franklin is as significant as the other two items in the email, the trip will be well worth it! And of course it would be great to enjoy a stop in England with Chara."

He pulled out his phone and texted Chara, "Second honeymoon, here we come!"

Nic shifted in his seat. "Uh, guys, I've been thinking about this whole endeavor. Ephesians 4:11-13 makes it clear that the role of the pastors and teachers is to equip God's people for works of serving God's purposes. But it seems like the current model of church is for the pastors to do the works of service while believers just sit in the pew.

"This has got to hinder any lasting missions impact," Nic

mused. “I mean, if I focused on serving the personal needs of my employees rather than equipping them, we’d never get out and make deals. That would kill any business!”

John nodded. “Apart from Church in the City, that sounds like most churches I’ve been in. It’s a challenge for pastors to send their members out to the nations, and it’s hard for church members to develop the confidence and skills to actually go.

“Last week I was in Ephesians 1:9–10,” John continued. “God has had a mysterious plan from the beginning of time to bring everything—every people group, every nation—under the authority of Jesus. This *must* be the central mission of the *whole* body of Christ—every member. If we don’t take this on as our mission, then we’re missing out on God’s plans.”

“Something’s gotta give, guys!” Christopher said, more loudly than he intended, once again prompting looks his direction.

He lowered his voice. “I only wish we had started out more missionally at Church in the City. If we had been serious from the beginning about finishing the task by a specific date, we would have done a lot of things very differently.”

John leaned forward and gripped Christopher’s shoulder. Christopher, feeling the firmness, knew this was a rare moment. “Look at me! We’ve been faithful with what we’ve known. *You’ve* been faithful with what you knew. Now we must be faithful with the new things God is showing us. He is sovereign. No second-guessing. And our loving faith community is a great foundation to work from.”

John continued, but his voice softened. “The six years since Church in the City started have been amazing, but you’re just a pastor, and a bivocational one at that—substitute teaching and leading us in your free time. What more could you do?”

“No, bro,” Christopher pulled back from John’s grasp. “I’m not *just* a pastor. It’s that type of thinking that has locked me into the ruts of maintenance ministry. I’ve got to think differently. *We’ve* got to think differently. Don’t you see? I’ve got to think of myself not as a pastor of people but a pastor of pastors—like I do with our church plants. A pastor of sent-out ones.”

Christopher’s eyes watered as he looked back and forth at his friends.

“And our church, small as we are, must not be just a church any longer. We must be a training and sending base to the nations. A church spawning and shepherding new churches—a catalyst for movements.”

His two friends nodded slowly, deliberately.

Without warning, Christopher bowed his head. His friends knew the familiar cue. They joined him in prayer.

“Let’s pray for as long as it takes to clarify what God is saying to us. We must change our thinking, our faith, our expectations, our actions. Only in this way can we hasten the return of Christ!”

# EIGHT

---

**Nine men sat** at a triangular table, three per side. The early morning light diffused through the pointed gothic windows, barely illuminating the outlines of the figures bent over the table. The small room was void of all markings except a few ancient tapestries that graced the walls. In the hearth, a dying fire awaited fresh fuel.

Near the head of the table, if one could call it the head, a particularly grizzled old man spoke with a raspy voice.

“Number Three, how is our man coming?”

“Splendidly,” replied a man who was younger only by comparison. “He sees and thinks well. He has much potential.”

“Will he find us?” Number One continued.

“Yes, Prime Director—if we don’t destroy him first. Hopefully he will get past our traps.”

“Very good,” replied Number One. He brushed a fallen gray lock from his eyes, rose slowly from his seat, and hobbled out of the room.

In the hearth, the fire gave one last pop. A few glowing coals amidst the ashes were all that remained of its former glory.

# NINE

---

**As she had been instructed**, Marlene appeared at Senator Wroth's suite in San Francisco's Clift Hotel at 7 a.m. The senator was finishing his breakfast with his tablet open to his five daily online newspapers.

Marlene sat down across the table. "I got word from Simmons just an hour ago. It didn't take long for him to find a data entry clerk willing to talk. She had been told to delete the account. But for the right sum she provided Simmons with the location of the paper file containing the original application."

"Paper file? This is the twenty-first century, right?"

"Yes, sir, but evidently not in this Italian credit card company. The file is in a warehouse, and Jake's on his way to get it. I told him to use the satellite number to reach us on the Challenger 850 when he has more news."

"Great work, Marlene. And what have you learned from the AAs on Capitol Hill?"

"Before we left yesterday, I sent them a discreet message. They'll go through their phone logs this morning, and I should have their results by the time we arrive back in Washington."

\* \* \*

Three hours later, as the senator and Marlene were cruising home at forty-one thousand feet, Senator Wroth began reflecting aloud on the previous evening.

"Marlene, I've known Dr. Sayers all my life. There's a subtle magic in his ways. Think about it. How did the governor and I reach agreement on Bowen? Neither of us would have chosen him. He's a virtual non-entity."

Marlene kept her mouth shut as Wroth allowed her a rare glimpse into his private musings.

"The governor and I rarely see eye to eye, and I really expected a fight over Spears's succession. I was ready to lobby hard for Mairs to finish Spears's term. Bowen wasn't even on my

radar, but he's the perfect choice. Why didn't we see it before Dr. Sayers suggested it?

"And then for the governor to agree—no, to advocate for—Bowen. It was a masterstroke. How did Dr. Sayers do it?"

A relaxed Senator Wroth returned from the bar with another drink and swiveled his plush chair to look Marlene in the eye.

"Marly, Uncle Lars always called this his 'gift'—this ability to look into someone's mind and almost read it, then influence their thoughts so the other person accepted Lars's conclusions as their own. I need to develop this gift. Find a time when I can meet with Dr. Sayers. I need his mentoring in this area."

Marlene's gaze was transfixed by her tall, Hollywood-handsome boss.

"Now, what briefs do I need to review?" Like a flipped switch, Senator Wroth was all business again. The precious window into his personal thoughts had closed.

Marlene blinked to attention. Before she could pull out the briefs, the satellite phone rang. Marlene answered and listened, her face looking first puzzled, then sober, then pale. After ending the call she stared at the senator, clearly shaken.

"That was Jake Simmons," she said, attempting to regain her composure. "He found the file with the original credit application. It was a personal account with the name..." She hesitated. "Your name. Michael Wroth. It listed your private Bel Air address, unlisted phone number, and checking account."

"That's impossible! No one has that information—no one!"

"Senator, Simmons ran a trace. There was a transfer from your account in Beverly Hills to the credit card account in Rome equal to the cost of both phone calls."

To Marlene's astonishment, Senator Wroth roared with laughter. "This guy's superb! How I have underestimated him! This makes it more imperative than ever that I find this serpent. Not only must I bring him to justice, there's much I need to learn from him."

Senator Wroth continued to chuckle in admiration. "Tell Simmons to guard that file! We wouldn't want the police to get their hands on it. They might not find the situation humorous, nor see so readily that I've been framed."

Marlene breathed a sigh of relief.

“Marlene, we’re going to have to outfox this guy ever so quietly. There’s a crucial vote in two days on a defense reduction package. It looks to be just as close as the trade bill was. Our caller just might want to influence that as well.”

\* \* \*

That evening at the conference table in Senator Wroth’s office, Marlene reported more of her findings.

“So far seven senators’ AAs have reported receiving ‘code ten’ phone calls—four Republicans and three Democrats.”

“With the two dead senators, that’s five Democrats,” Senator Wroth observed, studying the list.

“Interesting,” he continued. “All seven are fairly moderate. If we examine their voting records, I think we will find they’ve given swing votes in major decisions. Where’s the list of senate bills they received calls on?”

Marlene handed him an impressive list. Not only had she identified the senators who received calls, she had also pinpointed the dates, pulled records of the legislation then under debate, and listed the votes and outcomes.

Wroth scanned it. “Extremely complex, but the direction is clear. The caller is influencing global policy toward greater worldwide cooperation. I think the vote in two days is too crucial for him to pass up. My bet is he’ll want this defense reduction to pass—a weaker America will have less divisive power in the world he is trying to create. Give me the probable vote count as it stands today on the defense bill.”

Marlene looked through her papers. “Most of the senators have expressed their intentions, and it looks close, sir. As it stands, the bill will lose forty-eight to fifty-two.”

“How convenient,” Senator Wroth said. “Four of our colleagues on the ‘code ten’ list have indicated they’ll vote against the bill. If my guess is right, our caller will contact three of them, if not all four, to swing their vote for the bill. Call a meeting of these four senators in my office at 8 a.m. tomorrow.”

“But sir, that will require calling them at home and ...”

One look from Senator Wroth stopped her objections. She

would find some way to gather these senators.

\* \* \*

Once alone with Marlene and the other senators, Senator Wroth greeted them in his most congenial and disarming manner.

“Gentlemen and madam, I cannot thank you enough for being here on such short notice.”

Several shifted uneasily in their seats.

“I won’t take much of your time, but this is a matter of grave importance. I will be blunt and expect you to hold my words in the strictest confidence, as I will yours.

“You four have something in common. You have all received at least one ‘code ten’ phone call prior to a crucial senate vote.”

The room became deathly silent. “I am not here to ask you about those previous calls. I don’t want to know if or how those calls influenced you. But I have reason to believe the ‘code ten’ caller may have been responsible for the deaths of Senators Spears and Hansen.”

The senators shifted nervously, but no one said a word.

Finally, one of them cleared his throat. “Michael, what you’re suggesting is very serious. Why exactly have you called us here?”

Senator Wroth uncrossed his legs and leaned forward, lowering his voice. “This is far more than blackmail—this is outright manipulation of U.S. policy under force of threat. The ‘code ten’ caller has become bolder and recently found two of his ‘pawns’ expendable. Such a fate may await the rest of you.

“For this reason we must act swiftly, and I have asked you here privately to propose a confidential plan without the risks of involving others.”

The room remained silent. Each knew a leak could well cost his or her office, or worse.

“There are no guarantees,” Senator Wroth continued, “and our options are limited. But if we work together, I think we stand a good chance of beating this guy. Here is what I propose.

“You have all indicated that you will vote against the defense reduction bill tomorrow. From studying the ‘code ten’ caller’s record, I have a strong suspicion he will call three or four of you to swing your votes in favor of the bill.



“I’m not here to suggest how you respond. I am only asking that when he contacts you, you have your AA immediately call my private number while you stall as long as you can before you take his call. I’ll have a private force observing the phone booths this caller has used in the past. As soon as you report to us, we’ll trace the call and move in to catch him.”

“*Who* will move in on him?” the New England Democrat asked uneasily.

“I have arranged for a sufficient force to take this guy out of action—men who will not leak information.”

“And if there are more than one?”

“We will have the caller under surveillance before taking action. If others are involved, we will know.”

Senator Wroth stood and opened the door. “If you have no further questions, I think we all have work to do. Ms. Hayes will give you the number to call.”

When all had departed, Marlene turned to Senator Wroth, “Do you think they’ll do it?”

“Yes. They’re scared, but they’ll do it. They can’t go on living the way they have. I just gave them their only way out.”

Wroth paused and looked at the ceiling. He scratched his chin, then spoke. “Call the colonel. We’ve got just one more job for him.”

# TEN

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**“Win, you’ve done it again!** Blast you! No matter the odds, you always beat me! I can’t recall the last time I won.”

Harry Evans sat on one side of the six-by-eight foot table, shaking his head in frustration.

“Ready to call it, Harry? If not, we can play it out.” Even at sixty-five and graying, six-foot-four Win Dunbar was an imposing figure. He stood and surveyed the table of inch-high war-game figures spread over a valley bisected by a ridge. A large force of Germanic hordes lay scattered around the table, each unit fleeing a much smaller Roman cavalry as Roman infantry watched from the hilltop. Even someone unfamiliar with the hobby of ancient military war games could easily predict the conclusion.

“Play it out? Shoot, Win! With what? I outnumbered you three to one, and yet this is my worst defeat ever! I’m ready for you to retire the distinguished Julius Caesar. Don’t you think he’s won enough battles?”

Yet Harry knew it wasn’t the miniature figure of Caesar on a black horse that won battles. It was Win Dunbar who won the battles—Colonel Winthrop Dunbar, to be exact. No one called him Winthrop and got away with it—except his feisty wife Jeanie. Others just called him “Win” or, more often, “Colonel.”

Several years earlier he had retired from commanding Special Forces in the Marines. He had been passed over for promotion to general, and his rank and age had meant he could no longer command forces in the field. But paperwork and the political maneuvering of administrative duty didn’t sit well with this highly-decorated, in-the-trenches commander. So he and Jeanie, his wife of forty-two years, had retired to the outskirts of Phoenix. There he had used part of their savings to open the small hobby shop specializing in miniature war games where he and Harry were now competing.

With his pension and Jeanie’s substitute teaching, they didn’t

need the extra income, but military strategy was his passion.

“What did I do wrong, Win? How did you beat me?”

“Harry, you could have won this battle easily. You just made a few critical misjudgments. First, since you knew your Germans outnumbered my Romans three to one, you should have kept your line more balanced, bringing all your forces to bear equally on my small army, with maneuverable reserves ready to pounce on any weaknesses in my line. Instead, you let me lure you out of a good battle plan. Remember, strategy—your overarching plan for how to win—must guide your actions. Stick to your strategy, your battle plan, even if the moment-by-moment tactics change.

“Second, you lost the battle because you lost control of your troops and fought on my terms. You let your troops charge out of control, thinking they would overwhelm me. But when the real battle developed, on ground of my choosing, you could no longer control their movements—something every general must be able to do. Many a general had a great strategy but was unable to apply it because of poor troop control in the battle. My only chance with a much smaller force was to attack with a highly disciplined strike force when and where you least expected. I knew my elite units wouldn’t turn back, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

“Finally, you were overconfident. After all, who can lose a battle when he outnumbers his foe three to one? An overconfident general, that’s who! Why back in Desert Storm...”

The colonel’s analysis after a battle could last as long as the battle itself. But seeing that Harry was in no mood to hear more, the colonel stopped mercifully short.

And so whether as Caesar or Charlemagne, Alexander or Attila, the colonel frequently found himself beating unsuspecting foes at the wargaming table. And if from time to time his sales managed to pay his modest rent, so much the better.

He was retired and satisfied, or so he told himself.

\* \* \*

The shrill ring of the mobile phone startled them both. Jeanie picked it up and carried it across the room to her husband. Win eyed the caller ID. Unknown. That couldn’t be good.

He pressed the speaker button. “Dunbar.”

Marlene Hayes was at the other end. “Colonel Dunbar, we have one more mission for you—one of utmost secrecy.”

Win wanted to toss the phone into the trashcan. He sneered, “Aren’t they all?”

Marlene ignored the remark. “The senator would be very grateful for your services.”

“I’ve fought his wars one too many times. I’m done with the turncoat.”

“But this one requires your unique abilities.”

Win breathed deeply and let out a long exhale. “After what he has done to me, you expect me to wag my tail like a lapdog?”

Marlene paused at the other end. “The senator wanted me to impress upon you how *very* much he needs this, and that he will continue to guard certain secrets, should you agree.”

Jeanie shook her head vigorously and mouthed the word “no.”

The colonel leaned forward. Beads of perspiration formed on his shaven head. His chest began heaving rapidly.

Jeanie grabbed the phone from his limp hand. “Ms. Hayes, your boss is a vile serpent in sheep’s clothing. I advise you to distance yourself as far from him as you can. My husband no longer answers to the manipulative requests from Wroth’s forked tongue. He has destroyed my husband’s career. Never call again!” Then she ended the call.

Win looked up at her in disbelief. “Three years of silence. I thought we had escaped that life.”

“We have.”

“Do you know what you have done? The things he could reveal about me?”

Jeanie wrapped her arms around his bear-like shoulders. “And risk incriminating himself? I think this is a gamble worth taking. We are no longer selling our souls to the devil.”

# ELEVEN

---

*Miracles?*

*You, Jesus, are the same yesterday, today, and always.*

*Why should I expect You to act differently today  
than You did in the book of Acts?*

*The enemy doesn't stand a chance!*

—Ruth Grant

**Christopher chuckled inside** as he and Chara relaxed in their business-class recliners on their way from Singapore to London. How had Nic swung this upgrade? “It’s for your second honeymoon, bro,” was all he would say. *God, sometimes You’re just too good! I feel spoiled. We couldn’t even afford our own tickets, much less business-class tickets!*

But for the steady hum of jet engines and the occasional snore of other passengers, the dark cabin was quiet. Just two spotlights shone on the journals the couple had opened on their tray tables. They conversed in hushed voices, unable to sleep.

“I’m telling you, Chara, I’ve been reading the book of Acts over and over each week for a couple of months now. I knew they could happen again—CPMs, I mean. But when Brother Ying shared about the movement in East Asia, I began jumping up and down inside. Now I am hearing with my own ears of Acts being repeated in modern times! It puts flesh on my ideas. Now I can see the way forward.”

“I know what you mean,” agreed Chara. “One point seven million new believers in just ten years! And Brother Ying is such a humble, unassuming man. But I have to say his example makes me a bit ashamed,” she admitted sheepishly. “You heard him say that he and his wife pray for one or two hours each day before leaving their house, didn’t you? Their commitment to reaching the lost is much deeper than mine.”

Chara pulled the blanket tighter around her legs. “I get the

feeling there's nothing Brother Ying and his wife wouldn't give up to see God reach the lost. What was that question he said drove him? 'How many of my people will hear the gospel today?' I was really convicted listening to him. It was also eye opening to hear about new disciples immediately making disciples who then make disciples. It's the Great Commission all over again!"

Christopher took another sip of tea and leaned close again. "Honey, you know there's nothing I want more than to be a man of the Word who obeys it without reservation. Too often these days I hear methods advocated simply because 'they work.' What encouraged me most in Brother Ying's story is that the methods and principles he teaches are straight from the Bible.

"Don't get me wrong. We do need to evaluate periodically whether what we're doing is 'working.' But if that becomes our final benchmark, it's like saying 'the end justifies the means.'"

Chara nodded, squeezed her husband's hand, and laid her head on his shoulder.

"No," Christopher continued, "what we learned these last two weeks starts with eternal principles set out in Scripture and then uses case studies to help illustrate those principles in various contexts. The methods these people are using seem to invite the Spirit of God to act. Does that make sense?"

Chara lifted her head and looked into Christopher's eyes. "I was thinking the same thing! That's what I love about you. You're such a man—a real man, a biblical man. This 'Training for Trainers' approach is just a vehicle for returning to very ancient biblical principles. We don't need something new, but something very old!"

"Shh!" Christopher whispered gently.

Chara suddenly realized how loud her remark had been. A flight attendant, aware they were the only passengers awake in the cabin, carried a tray down the aisle.

"Madam, would you like a tea also?"

Chara accepted the cup and carefully sipped the hot beverage.

Christopher quietly continued Chara's line of thought. "You're exactly right. Not new, but old. I think this is a process we could adapt in L.A. without losing the biblical principles.

"But you know, as I think about our two weeks in Singapore,

the thing that stands out most is how that time built my faith. Day by day, the clouds obscuring God's true nature were stripped away. And the more I was exposed to how our Father is working in this world, the more faith I felt in my spirit. This can happen again. Acts can happen again in new ways and places!"

\* \* \*

Daylight stirred Christopher and Chara from their fitful slumber. They were now two hours from Heathrow, and the Singapore Airlines flight attendants were serving breakfast.

"Sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Ch-ch-chara?"

Chara rubbed the sleep from her eyes. "Uh, that's *Chara*—like the word *car* with an *uh* on the end," she said with a smile. "That's what I get for having a Greek professor for a father. He could have named me Joy, but gave me the Greek name instead."

"Okay, Mrs. Chara, would you care for a prawn omelet or mee goreng noodles to go with your croissants, fruit, and yogurt?"

"Oh, mee goreng, please. I fell in love with it in Singapore."

"And Mr. Christopher?"

"Prawns in an omelet? Gotta have it!"

Across the aisle from Christopher sat a pair of U.S. Marines, facing them.

"Business class is a rare treat for us," said Christopher. "Do you get this kind of luxury often?"

"No," one replied. "But sometimes when the economy section is overbooked an airline will honor us this way."

"Where are you men headed?"

"Back to a North Africa peacekeeping mission. This London stop is out of the way, but the flights through Dubai and Istanbul were full."

"How do you like North Africa?" Christopher asked.

The men hesitated.

"It has its moments, sir," answered the bigger man finally.

Chara probed further. "Not like home, right?"

"No, ma'am," the other Marine said. "No place is like the good ol' U.S. of A. But that's not what Private Harris means."

Private Harris glanced sharply at his companion.

"What I mean, ma'am," said Private Harris, "is that it has its

moments. It's our post, ma'am. Doesn't matter what we think."

The Marines were young enough to engage Chara's mothering instinct. "I understand," she said. "I'm really sorry it's hard. We surely do appreciate you serving our country this way. What do you find so difficult there? Isn't a peacekeeping mission easier than some other assignments?"

"Well, ma'am, it's like this," said Private Lopez, glancing at his companion. "We're Marines, see? Marines. We're not trained for babysitting. I'm not saying that troops shouldn't be engaged in peacekeeping. Don't get me wrong. If the Commander in Chief wants troops, he knows best—"

"You're digging yourself into a hole, Gus," interrupted Harris.

"Ma'am, what Gus means is that we're not being utilized to the best of our training. We're Marines. We're at our finest when we're inserted into hostile situations as the initial shock troops. We establish beachheads—safe zones for the insertion of regular troops. Once we're done, we move on to other hostile situations. We're modern-day trailblazers in enemy territory. We're no good at the mopping up."

"What do you mean, mopping up?" asked Chara.

"That's jargon we use for everything that happens after our initial strike," Lopez answered. "Ma'am, we Marines feel that what we do is the most urgent part of combat—overcoming the primary defense or at least making a way for the army to come in and overpower the enemy. The mopping up is the part after that first wave; it's when communication and logistics are set up and the regular troops who are not trained for shock fighting scour the surrounding area, root out the enemy, and secure a strong base of operations. Mopping up is important. But we like to think the battle is won or lost with the Marines.

"Of course, the Army Rangers and Navy SEALs feel the same way," he acknowledged with a grin.

"Sort of like commandos?" Christopher asked.

"Yes, sir. We're not all like Rambo," Harris chuckled, "but that's the idea. The armed forces need the commandos or shock troops to go into the areas they're uniquely trained for. If they don't go first, no one goes in. We're not trained to sit around and keep peace."



Chara sympathized as best she could. “I see what you mean. But it sounds tough—the commando work.”

“Tough isn’t a strong enough word,” Lopez said. “But we do it because we think it’s the most important thing to do, ma’am.”

Christopher was impressed with the deep confidence—almost arrogance—of these young men. No doubt they were good at what they did. And what a contrast these two serious, zealous young soldiers were from the relaxed Owens on their pleasure trip to England. These young men didn’t fit the peacetime culture of their homeland. They belonged in dangerous, strategic areas—Iwo Jima, Afghanistan, or Somalia.

\* \* \*

Unlike the twentieth century steel and glass universities of America, Franklin oozed stateliness and history. The simple archway inscription read: Franklin College, Founded 1659.

Chara felt the need to whisper in this hallowed place. “Do we have any colleges this old?”

“Barely. Harvard was the first college in the United States, and it’s only two decades older than Franklin. As far as the Brits are concerned, we’re spring chickens.”

“Franklin looks like it’s seen better days,” whispered Chara. “And Christopher, I know you like to get right to the point. But when we meet the librarian, let me talk with her, okay?”

Eventually Christopher and Chara found the library where they met the very Mrs. Goodenough whom Nic had found so unhelpful—a large woman in her seventies, with creases worn into her forehead by a permanent scowl.

Before Christopher could speak, Chara began disarming the woman with genuine compliments about the school grounds and its extensive library. Soon the two were chatting easily about the classics. At an appropriate moment in the conversation, Chara explained their hopes of reading the Livermore dissertation.

“We’ve heard it’s a landmark work, and we’ve traveled all the way from America to see it. But I’m afraid all we have is the author’s name.”

The librarian took her by the hand. “Don’t worry yourself, dearie. It is a landmark work. Of that I have no doubt. Most of

our dissertations are, of course. They are the crowning achievements of the Empire's finest scholars. Now you just come with me. This dissertation deserves your attention, and if anyone can locate it, I can."

After perusing the ancient card catalog for several minutes, the matron whispered, "Aha, you cannot hide from me!"

She put on her glasses and read, "A Dissertation Submitted Toward Completion of the Doctor of Philosophy Degree. M. J. Livermore. 1898. Title: 'The Collapse of the Military Metaphor in the Mission of the Early Church and the Resulting Stalemate in the Advance of the Gospel.'"

"Ah, yes. Quite a significant work. Referenced often, I would imagine, by scholars in this century. Yes, yes. Quite significant. It will be among the dissertation stacks. Right this way."

The three walked down a flight of stairs and maneuvered their way through a seemingly endless maze of bookshelves.

"Hmm..."

Mrs. Goodenough looked at the card and examined the shelf again until she found a dissertation-sized gap.

"Well, this is rather odd. The book is missing! I patrol these stacks hourly. It must have been pinched this very morning."

Chara stared at the cobwebs in the gap. "What was that, Mrs. Goodenough?"

"Pinched, I say! I shall report this to the authorities. I assure you we shall apprehend the hoodlums swiftly."

"Perhaps you're right," responded Chara. "Unfortunately, we have to return to the States soon. Surely you keep a copy of these works on microfiche."

"Bite your tongue, dearie! We do not resort to such new-fangled contraptions. The library of Franklin College is as safe as the Tower of London!"

"Are you sure it's gone? Is there any other place we might find a copy?" Chara begged.

"Well, it has always been standard practice for doctoral students to make their own copy of the original manuscript. Such a volume might still be in existence as a family heirloom. Let me ring the alumni office and see if they can help us locate the family of M.J. Livermore."

The Owens followed Mrs. Goodenough to her office and waited. Finally she hung up the phone.

“Alumni records show one surviving family member, a Mrs. Gladys Somerset of Norwich—Dr. Livermore’s granddaughter. That record has not been updated for a few years, so its current accuracy is suspect, I fear. Are you two dearies sure you don’t want to wait for the bobbies to nab the burglar?”

\* \* \*

The unkempt cottage was nestled snugly among similar bungalows on a narrow back street. Christopher knocked soundly on the door, waited, and then knocked again. Perhaps he and Chara had arrived a few decades too late. Discouraged, they returned to the car.

As Christopher started the engine, Chara touched his arm.

“Someone’s at the door!” she said, jumping out of the car and bounding back to the doorstep.

An elderly woman peered past the chained door. “Yes?”

“Hi. We are looking for a Mrs. Somerset. I’m Chara Owen, and this is my husband, Christopher. We’ve come from America in search of a Ph.D. dissertation by a Dr. M.J. Livermore, Mrs. Somerset’s grandfather. Is this the right place?”

“Do tell? Yes. I am Mrs. Somerset,” the old woman laughed.

In no time she had the door unchained and was escorting them to the parlor. Though she must have been ninety, Mrs. Somerset moved buoyantly, as if she hadn’t had a visitor in years.

The walls of the parlor were filled with shelves of neatly ordered volumes. On the windowsill, a fat gray cat vied with a Boston fern for the sun’s warmth.

The woman pointed a finger and spoke to the cat. “Thucydides, you keep these young people company while I get them some tea and cake.”

She hummed her way to the kitchen and returned bearing tea and white cake on a silver tea service. As Mrs. Somerset chatted gaily about the weather, Chara discreetly wiped dust from the rim of her cup and did her best to nibble at the stale cake.

As the conversation waned, Christopher asked again, “Mrs. Somerset, do you know anything about your grandfather’s

sertation?”

“I’m sorry. I don’t know where you got your information, but M.J. Livermore was not my grandfather.”

Christopher’s face fell.

“She was my grandmother—Mary Jane Livermore! She was Franklin College’s first female doctoral candidate and hoped using the initials might gain her more respect. But it didn’t help. Her research was rejected by her professors and her peers, and her degree was never conferred.

“The unpublished, unapproved dissertation did find its way to the library stacks, and she tried valiantly over the years to get someone to accept her thesis. But no one wanted to listen to a woman, especially one who had not completed her doctorate.

“As far as I know, you are the first people in at least fifty years who cared to look at her dissertation. Yes, I have a copy.”

She pulled out an ancient, dust-covered tome and gently dropped it on the table. A thud reverberated through the room.

# TWELVE

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*I have an odd sense that my death is imminent.  
Could the death of a twenty-three-year-old be the  
seed falling into the ground that will produce much fruit?  
Oh, let not my death be in vain.  
May it inspire others to realize it is a mere passing  
into the next, more glorious stage, of eternal life.  
What a simple sacrifice to serve the King!*

—Ruth Grant

**Christopher and Chara** sat in their living room, a precious photocopy of the Livermore dissertation on the table before them. With them were their closest friends—John, Renee, Nic, and Stacy.

“Enough with the suspense, Christopher,” John said. “This isn’t the last scene of a Sherlock Holmes mystery. Tell us about the dissertation!”

“In due time, Watson. Let’s pray first.”

Together they rejoiced in all God had done since their last meeting and sought His power to be faithful in all He was asking them to do.

Then Christopher began eagerly summarizing Livermore’s insight.

“The early Church advanced rapidly—supernaturally fast—through most of the first century. At that rate, the known world would have been evangelized within a few centuries!”

“But then a major shift occurred,” Chara added. “And world evangelization slowed to a crawl. Even though the pace picked up in the 1800s, according to Livermore it lagged far behind that first century. Now it was mission by the few rather than mission by the whole church.”

“Livermore’s analysis is brilliant,” Christopher continued. “Her Salvation Army upbringing helped her see the wartime

mindset the New Testament Church lived with, in which each Christ-follower lived as a soldier charged with advancing God's Kingdom."

"This is crazy!" Nic interrupted. "I've been reading ahead for our Perspectives class, and Dr. Winter has an article on this. Hold on..." Nic leafed through his book. "Yeah, here it is. *Reconsecration to a Wartime, Not a Peacetime, Lifestyle*. He shares this awesome example of how, when outfitted for war, the *Queen Mary* housed fifteen thousand soldiers even though it only had room for *three* thousand passengers as a peacetime luxury liner. Winter said that believers today are living with a peacetime mindset."

"Exactly," Christopher said. "The Allies were invested in World War II like the first-century believers were invested in advancing God's Kingdom. They had the end in sight. My grandmother used to tell us how everyone took part in the war effort and everything was rationed. Every able-bodied man joined the fight, and those who didn't felt ashamed. Women worked in the factories because the men were all at war. School kids saved their money to buy war bonds. Nothing was wasted. Everything was recycled. Everyone was mobilized. This is the kind of 'all in' mindset the early Church had."

Christopher stood and began pacing. "The early believers set their hearts on heaven rather than earthly comforts, and they embraced simplicity to focus on the spiritual battle. Their sense of urgency was fueled by an expectation of winning the war and welcoming the return of their Commander in Chief during their generation. Then," Christopher paused and looked down, "it all slowed down."

"So," Renee asked, "what changed?"

Christopher stopped pacing and bowed his head. "The loss of wartime urgency was the central factor in the church's declining zeal for Kingdom advance. Jesus didn't return in that generation. And without a finish line in sight, it became increasingly difficult for believers to live sacrificially with a wartime mindset. Later communities of faith matured more slowly, evangelized less aggressively, multiplied less frequently, and became entangled in lesser issues. The quest lost its urgency.

“The Church shifted to a peacetime mentality, and the end of widespread persecution gave rise to huge theological debates. Eventually the central mission of the Church became just one of its activities rather than its rallying battle cry.”

“So how do we change that?” Nic asked.

“Livermore’s thesis was that the only way to complete the mission was full-scale ‘military’ mobilization of the whole global Church, fueled again by an expectation of the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

“And here’s the kicker. Livermore contended that around 90 AD God gave the book of Revelation to John—the last surviving apostle—to encourage the Church that He had not forgotten the mission. Revelation is God’s promise to succeeding generations that He is in control and His Kingdom will prevail. Revelation is Christ’s marching orders for His body, to inspire the Church to ever-greater exploits beyond the first century. Unfortunately, most believers throughout history have missed this central point amidst the symbolism of Revelation.”

Nic could barely contain himself. “Okay, so the first believers expected Jesus to return soon, and they lived and labored toward that end. But later believers lost that expectation, and with it they lost the momentum to bring it about. So what can we do to recover this expectation and regain that lost momentum?”

The room was silent for a couple of minutes.

John voiced what they were all thinking. “So, ... Christopher, what do you propose we do with this understanding?”

Christopher and Chara grinned at each other. “As Chara and I see it, we are closer to finishing the task than ever in history. Non-Christians outnumbered those first century believers three hundred sixty to one, while today there are only about seven non-Christians for every Christian. An awakened Church could move swiftly to ‘no place left’ without the gospel. We have to inspire and guide a new generation to live with a wartime mentality in anticipation of Christ’s return. By His strength, it is so doable!”

“We must raise up laborers like those Marines we flew to London with,” Chara said. “Christian commandos—missionary shock troops whose sole aim is to establish vibrant, multiplying

communities of believers as ‘beachheads’ that will turn into movements in every remaining unreached people group.”

“Our first step,” Christopher said, “is for the six of us and then all of Church in the City to recognize and grapple with the fact that Jesus really could return at any time! And as we take the gospel to unreached people groups, we need to impart that same conviction to the new believers. Then, like the apostle Paul, we must charge them with responsibility for expanding the Kingdom among their own people and beyond in the power of the Holy Spirit while we move on.

“Like Paul, we may return periodically to follow up, but we can’t babysit them. We must provide these new believers with initial discipleship and teach them how to feed themselves and others from God’s Word under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit in submission to one another. We must trust the Holy Spirit in them. Then we must take some of them with us as we move on to other groups that have yet to hear.”

Chara added. “Christopher’s not implying that we don’t also need long-term missionaries; just the opposite. The kind of shock troops we are discussing go in for a couple of years and establish new communities of believers. But after that, just as in military operations, others are needed to build up the resulting local church.”

John rose from the couch and approached their makeshift whiteboard. Christopher winked at Chara. John was in, and he was about to do what he did best. “History tells us there’s another reason the world may need something fresh like we are discussing. All types of movements tend to calcify over time.”

He drew a line rising and then plateauing.

“For instance, our established organizations began as missions-sending *movements*. But over time, every movement develops institutionalism. This adds long-term stability while restricting innovation and risk-taking.”

Nic added, “And these structures tend to resist risk-taking because too much is at stake. Happens in business all the time.”

“Exactly!” John continued, “This calcification can take a few years or a few decades, but eventually what starts as a movement stalls out, and new initiatives are needed to continue forward



progress.”

With that, John drew a new line rising above the others. “A fresh initiative is needed if we are going to reach the remaining unreached people groups.”

Christopher looked warmly at his normally skeptical friend.

“Exactly, bro. We need thousands of shorter-term, high-risk pushes to complement what is already going on. We can call and equip some believers as commandos—trained for initial entry and ready to give up all for the King’s war effort in anticipation of His return. We can inspire others to pursue similar initiatives. We can call those unable to go to the front lines to live just as sacrificially in order to free up resources for the task.

“Our rallying cry must be Jesus’ own words in Matthew 24:14 that the gospel be proclaimed to every remaining people group before His return. We cannot cause Christ’s return, but we can fulfill the conditions!”

Christopher stood and joined John at the white board. John nodded, handed him the marker, and gave him a quick wink. Christopher wrote 2025—*No Place Left* across it.

“We must embrace a target date by which we aim to finish this quest, no matter what it costs. Our mission objective must be nothing less than *no place left!*”

The two men sat down again, and silence reigned for several minutes.

Finally John spoke. “Renee, dear, I think it’s time for you to show the group what you’ve got.”

“Christopher wants a real-time tracking tool so we have a countdown showing what remains to be done. So I worked with Timothy on a system that can be available through a simple app to show the count of unengaged unreached people groups.”

Renee turned her tablet to the group. 3,227 UUPGs glowed in giant red text against a black background. “This way we can keep the urgency of the task always before us. I’ll send you each a link to download the app and help us with the beta testing.

“Christopher says, ‘If we can quantify it, we can complete it.’ As an attorney, I’d say it this way, ‘If we quantify it, we can tell when it is completed.’”

“It’s doable!” Nic said exuberantly. “Stacy and I did some

initial market projections—battle assessments, Chris, in your wartime terminology. Using the most conservative figures, for every UUPG there are at least eighty Protestant churches in America alone! And today the Church outside the U.S. is far bigger than it is here. The resources are in place.

“Don’t tell me we can’t muster enough missionaries to engage these people groups and finish the task. It can be done! And maybe God will pour out His revival Spirit and empower us to finish!”

“It makes me so mad!” Stacy said. “The devil has been lying to us for centuries, and we’ve believed him. I grew up thinking the job of missions was so big that it probably wouldn’t ever be finished. The lost world was just this big, nebulous ... oh, I don’t know ... blob. Something we could never really tackle. We’ve been believing the devil and missing out on God’s abundant blessing.

“Don’t you see? I used to run marathons. There is a point where you feel totally spent, but when the end is in sight, you find new reserves and give it your all—no holding back. It hurts, but you know it will soon be over. You hasten to the finish line.

“Satan has kept the end out of our sight. As a result we’ve just been jogging, maybe just marking time. We haven’t realized how near the finish line is. If we did, we would be sprinting now—no holding back.”

Everyone fell silent again. Finally Christopher spoke.

“Only one generation witnessed the first coming of Jesus on earth. Only one generation will see the second coming of Jesus. We missed the first one. I don’t want to miss the second. When He returns, I want to be able to say, ‘I faithfully prepared for you.’ I want to live to hasten the day of His return!

“Are we willing to live sacrificially in an all-out war effort to get to No Place Left without the gospel by 2025?”

“We would be a Kingdom preparation force,” said Nic, “a humble group of Christian commandos preparing the way for the coming of Christ’s Kingdom. A small strike force assaulting the gates of hell in each people group, escorting the nations into the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom Preparation Force!”

Stacy looked at Nic and nodded. “That’s right! No more

peacetime living for us!”

“The name sounds a little corny,” John said, “but I like the concept.” He returned to the board and wrote *KPF* next to the ascending line he had drawn rising above the others.

“I like the name.” Renee shot a glance at John. “It’s descriptive. Descriptive is good. We’re in too.”

“So does this mean we’re all in?” Christopher asked.

“I don’t imagine that the evil one will take this final pursuit of God’s Kingdom lying down,” Chara said. “He’ll throw everything he’s got at us. And we’ll need thousands of people to go—young, old, and everything in between. We *must* call people to this, but let’s not forget,” she looked at the group intently, “many of us will suffer persecution—and some of us may die.

“Let’s remember the generation in Revelation 12:11: ‘They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.’”

Christopher looked again at their dear brothers and sisters. “Are we willing to pay the price?”

Everyone nodded.

The six joined hands and prayed for strength to match their resolve. Christopher’s heart swelled with the pride a father has in seeing his child excel.

\* \* \*

Before heading to bed, Christopher tweeted:

**#NoPlaceLeft2025 is impossible without a wartime mindset. Will you mobilize with us for the final effort? A Kingdom Preparation Force!**

# THIRTEEN

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**Greely looked up** from his triple monitor array, genuinely worried. “Sir, could you come here please?” he called.

“What is it this time, Greely?”

Greely silently handed his report to Number Eight, who read the report—twice—and then turned it over to see if there was more. “How could they have gotten this item? That threat was removed seventeen years ago!”

“I-I-I don’t know, sir. Somehow the American got a copy. Eight hours ago he uploaded a complete PDF onto the Internet—free of charge.”

Greely saw Number Eight fidget nervously.

“Sir, if we act quickly, someone could snatch the American’s hard copy, ascertain where the file has spread, and erase it.”

“Are you insane, Greely?” The supervisor swore. “That would violate our essential posture of unobtrusiveness!”

“But sir. This is Priority A. Shouldn’t *something* be done?”

Number Eight’s glare dared Greely to raise his voice again.

“The Priority A item is not your concern. I shall report it to Number Three and notify the Timeline Room of a Level Six Possible Movement Insertion. Carry on with your work and keep alert for any further activity by this American.”

He straightened his tie. “Carry on.”

# FOURTEEN

---

**Jake Simmons** had a small army at his disposal. The well-built man in his early forties had years of connections in the CIA and the military's special forces. The result was that dozens of men with specialized training and experience were loyal to Simmons and willing to keep their mouths shut. He hadn't agreed with Senator Wroth's order to take a major strike force to Rome. But Senator Wroth was paying, and he paid well.

Jake's twenty-four men were positioned in small squads around the six different public phones that the caller had used. How old school this seemed—their target using public phones when everyone and his cousin carried a cell phone. Yet there was no denying that public phones, however antiquated, were still an anonymous way to place a call.

Once each of the teams had radioed in, Simmons settled back to await Senator Wroth's phone call. It came on the satellite phone around 8 p.m. local time.

"Jake, this is Marlene. We've traced a call to checkpoint three. Stay on the line, and let me know if you get visual on the caller."

Simmons radioed Team Three, who confirmed that they were observing an elderly man in the phone booth in question.

"We've got him, Ms. Hayes."

"Okay, as we discussed, just tail him. I repeat, just tail him. I want secondary confirmation through other calls he may make. And keep me posted."

Two of Jake's men followed the caller a couple blocks to the booth under surveillance by Team Four. They radioed Simmons.

"Sir, we have visual on the old man. He's entered the Team Four checkpoint."

"Roger that, Team Three. Team Four, do you have visual?"

"That's affirmative, sir. Elderly man in a gray overcoat just entered our checkpoint."

"Team Four, assume surveillance," Jake responded. "If he leaves, two of you follow him. Team Three, return to your

checkpoint.”

“Roger, chief. We’re heading back.”

Several minutes later, Jake returned Marlene’s call.

“Ms. Hayes, the suspect made several calls from two different phone booths. With two members of Team Four following, he went into a large, isolated building in an older section of town.”

“Jake, put all your men around that building!” Senator Wroth broke in on the line. “I don’t want anyone coming in or out of a door, window, or chimney without your men knowing where each of them goes! Stick on this guy like glue, but keep out of sight. I’ll be there by morning. Tell your men if our man is still under surveillance when I arrive and we tag this guy, there’s a five-thousand-dollar bonus for every man in your unit. And you’ll get twenty-five.”

“Yes, sir!”

\* \* \*

Senator Wroth sat with Simmons in a dark sedan across the street from the ancient building.

“We watched all night, sir,” Simmons said. “No one has come or gone.”

This back street in the Eternal City seemed to have died. Traffic was sparse, and few pedestrians passed. The few who did walked hurriedly. The building itself sported a fifteenth century facade, rising sheer, dark, and imposing.

“Every exit is covered, sir,” Jake continued. “I don’t think a mouse could have snuck in or out. Our man’s in there. You can’t see it, but toward the back a chimney is venting smoke from a wood-burning fireplace. Someone is keeping it fueled.”

“We don’t move until dark tonight,” said Senator Wroth. “Have your men rest in shifts so everyone stays alert. I’ll be back at 9 p.m.”

The car pulled around the corner and let Simmons out, then Senator Wroth returned to his suite. He needed to look his best for this evening’s confrontation.

\* \* \*

The six-foot-plus Senator Wroth looked imposing in his tailored suit and cashmere overcoat. The small bulge from the Beretta near his left breast was unnoticeable. As they drove toward the building that evening, Simmons wondered at how relaxed Wroth seemed, as if this sort of thing were a daily occurrence for him.

“Listen, Jake. I go in alone. I want you to personally monitor my wire. Have your guys burst in when I say ‘Now, Jake!’ but not a moment sooner.”

Simmons was clearly uneasy with this plan.

“Sir, this just doesn’t make sense. The proper course of action is for us to disarm the opposition while you wait for the dust to settle. We don’t need *three* dead senators on our hands.”

“Jake, we’ve been over this. What I’m about to encounter is top secret. I need to face this guy alone, and I don’t want anyone but you listening. If I’m in danger, you’ll have plenty of time to get there.”

Senator Wroth got out of the sedan and strode confidently toward the steps, sensing that this ancient building held far greater importance than the Capitol building with which he was so familiar. He approached the tall front door and, seeing no doorbell or knocker, tried the knob. The door opened readily and, slipping off his shoes, Senator Wroth stepped silently onto marble tiles leading down a long corridor.

A single flickering light pierced the darkness from the end of the corridor. Stealthily, Senator Wroth proceeded down the hallway. He tried to reassure himself with the thought of his twenty-five-man army outside. *Why don’t I feel safe?*

No sound came from the open doorway at the end—only a light dancing on the corridor walls in a senseless struggle against the darkness.

Senator Wroth mustered his courage and walked boldly through the doorway.

The room was dark, with a vaulted ceiling, fading tapestries on the walls, and a hearth at his left. There sputtered the fire casting the light in the corridor. To the right, the silhouettes of nine men loomed on the wall, as if illustrating the awe and

lessness Senator Wroth felt in the room.

Rising from the triangular mahogany table, an ancient man lifted his hand and pointed a trembling, long-nailed finger at Senator Wroth. His raspy voice filled the room with a strange European accent.

“We have been waiting for you, Mr. Wroth. We are glad you survived to make it here. You have shown much ingenuity and resourcefulness.”

Senator Wroth was bewildered. He had figured that “code ten” knew about his search, but only he, Marlene, and Jake’s army knew he was in Rome. How could these men be waiting for him? He was glad to have Simmons listening in.

“I am here to shut down your manipulation of the United States government. I expect full cooperation from each of you in unearthing the full extent and influence of ‘code ten.’ And should you think of trying to harm me or escape, know that surrounding this building and listening to our conversation are twenty-five of the world’s finest commandos. You would not make it out of this building alive.”

Spontaneous laughter from the others told Senator Wroth he had badly misjudged the situation. A graying man to the first speaker’s left stood and spoke in a rich, English baritone.

“Mr. Wroth, I see that you do not yet realize the extent of your folly and impudence.”

He motioned to the only empty chair at the table—a black velvet wingback.

“Please have a seat.

“Your mercenaries will not arrive,” the Englishman said. “The moment you stepped into our domain, your twenty-four hirelings were eliminated and Mr. Simmons was immobilized. The whole affair took sixteen seconds. It all happened very quietly, I might add. No one out there is listening to you right now.”

Senator Wroth paused to process this news.

“You are in for many more surprises, Mr. Wroth,” said the Englishman. “Please put your gun in that rubbish bin, then come and make yourself comfortable. Here’s your tea now—Darjeeling with a touch of caramelized sugar. Am I correct?”



“Yes, of course,” Senator Wroth whispered as surprise and bewilderment overwhelmed him briefly—emotions the senator rarely experienced. Regaining his composure, Senator Wroth tossed his gun in the wastebasket and sat with the nine men.

“Yes, this is exactly how I like my tea,” Senator Wroth said. “Thank you. Please continue. You clearly know my name. May I know yours?”

“Yes, I think that is appropriate. I am Number Three, in charge of Religion and Education,” the Englishman continued. “My esteemed colleague who first spoke to you is Number One, our Prime Director, also in charge of Politics. Seated around this table according to our specialization are ...”

“Yes, I can guess—Numbers Two through Nine.”

The middle-aged to elderly men around the table all nodded.

A thin Chinese man rose slowly. In a quiet, somewhat-British accent he said, “I am Number Two, in charge of Economics and Science.”

None of the other six introduced themselves, but Senator Wroth thought he could identify an Indian, an African, a Latino, an Arab, a Russian or Eastern European, and a Korean. All men. All old or moving in that direction. All confident.

“In time you will come to know all of us. That is, if you agree to join us,” continued Number Three. “We do not use names any longer—our old selves have vanished. We have become something new and altogether greater. We are—”

“Code Ten,” interrupted Senator Wroth.

“Incorrect, sir. We are simply *The Ten*. ‘Code Ten’ is the term we use when we visibly influence someone—a trifling toward which we are ill-disposed, but which is sometimes necessary. Now, Mr. Wroth, I will ask you to remain silent while I tell you a story. Be careful of jumping to conclusions. Currently you feel taken aback and are trying to regain an equal footing. Well, you are not on an equal footing—yet. Please simply listen.

“History tells us that in 476 AD a giant empire exhaled its last breath. The Roman ascendancy—which had dominated the Mediterranean world for seven hundred years—collapsed. The collapse was caused more by internal factors than external ones. Astute leaders of the late fourth century detected the decline in

the empire and foresaw its demise a century in advance. The *Pax Romana*—the great Roman peace, held together by the strength of its laws and their enforcement by its army—eventually ended and was replaced by feudalistic strife.

“Before the collapse, a few clarion voices sought to forestall the inevitable. Some were heeded, but most were ignored.

“Over time, these aforementioned leaders—all men of great influence—began meeting secretly. We do not even know their names, but one was a bishop of influence in the church, another a senator frustrated by the impotence of the Roman senate, and the third a wealthy trader wanting more than wealth. Each was troubled by Rome’s steady decline. Each peered nervously at the chaos on the horizon.

“That their empire would inevitably collapse was a foregone conclusion, one which they knew they were too late to alter. Yet as they met, a vision for a much grander world began to take shape. In their own realms these three had each seen how, more often than not, their greatest influence lay in working behind the scenes, unobserved.

“Gradually they realized that the strongest power is not in the emperor’s scepter, but in the whisper of his trusted advisor; not in the dictums of a pope, but in the maneuvering to elect the right pope; not in controlling a trading market, but in inciting the public to desire certain goods. Together these three removed themselves from the public arena in order to influence the world quietly and unobtrusively.

“As Rome collapsed, the balance of power shifted unpredictably as men rose to carve out their fiefdoms. Yet as lawlessness loomed on the horizon, these three envisioned something greater and far nobler. They envisioned a coming Rebirth of this world into a single united government, far surpassing Rome’s achievements, ensuring peace, stability, and abundance for all.

“These three were selfless, forward thinkers. They realized that a new peace governed by a new global empire was centuries or millennia away. The world must first be quietly readied for the idea. So even while the central authority was being squeezed out of the dying empire, they set into motion a mechanism—a

slowly centralizing power so that one day their successors could publicly usher in a new day.

“The three established their headquarters here in Rome—the Eternal City. Each enlisted two colleagues also of quiet influence, and together they laid out a strategy for the consolidation of power—three would influence politics; three, economics and science; and three, religion and education. One more was recruited as an apprentice in preparation for when the next of the nine would die, so there would never be a gap in their influence.

“Together they became The Ten—sacrificially dedicated to the Rebirth; not the vague, corrupt shadow they had seen in the dying Roman Empire or even in the imperfect peace of the Pax Romana at its zenith, but a fully united global peace to carry mankind into its greatest achievements. Together they made a covenant—not just to each other, but also to the world—vowing confidentiality and pledging lifelong allegiance to the vision of The Ten to their death.

“Their motto was *Movere potentiam sine notitia*—or, loosely translated, ‘Influence without being known to influence.’

“Here, in this sacred spot, they began their work based on their shared experience that the greatest influence is the one that is not seen. Overt power invites resistance. But what of a group that influences the world without being seen or known? Who will whisper into that group’s ears? Who will threaten excommunication or order a naval blockade against it?

“Mr. Wroth, the ultimate power in this world is the one that is free from outside coercion, either because it is secret or because it is so powerful outside influences irritate it only as a feather might irritate a diamond. Unable to become the latter until the Rebirth, The Ten became the former. Here from these quiet chambers in Rome, their work has continued undetected to this day. We are The Ten. The mantle of the original Ten rests upon us. And it is time for us to choose a tenth man. You, Mr. Wroth, are that man, should you accept.”

“Yet I detected you. I traced you here. You are not quite as powerful as you thought,” Senator Wroth responded.

Number Three chuckled.

would never have known about us. We would not have chosen to use a ‘code ten’ with senators who would reveal us unless we had a purpose. And then we removed them, as you know.

“You also sealed the fate of four additional senators when you met with them in your office. They will be removed shortly, along with all their secretaries who know anything. It will be seen as a terrorist act, but it will serve our purposes.”

Senator Wroth stood abruptly, his chair scraping the floor.

“Sit down, Mr. Wroth, and stop feigning anger,” Number Three said. “We have watched you for several years, since before you were a senator. We have watched and aided your rise through the circles of power in Washington. You have seen that covert power is greater than overt power, and you yourself desire more power. Yet how does a U.S. Senator become as powerful as you want to be? That is impossible, so what is next for you? Surely not governor. That would be a step down for you, Mr. Wroth. A run for the White House, perhaps? Yes, but then you realize that American presidents are mostly puppets controlled by popularity polls and hamstrung by Congress. Mr. Wroth, that is not the life for you. Your ambitions are higher. You will never let yourself be controlled by any outside group. Am I correct?”

Senator Wroth sat again, but now fully engaged—listening, processing, and synthesizing. “I could become president,” he heard himself answer, “but I would never be re-elected because I wouldn’t bow to popular opinion or special interest groups.”

With his customary swiftness, he had assessed the situation and was developing his own plan.

“Please continue, Number Three,” he said, no longer feeling off balance.

“We invite you to join us. Having recently suffered the loss of one of our community, we are inviting you to become our next apprentice. And lest the term ‘apprentice’ seem beneath you, let me assure you that our apprentices are more influential than any president, premier, pope, or tycoon.

“As an apprentice you will exert more power than you’ve ever had before. Today we operate almost omnipotently in line with our prime directive—to engineer world events to bring about the Rebirth as soon as possible.

“Each year, because of our influence, the Rebirth draws closer. Every means we use to hasten the Rebirth saves lives in the end. To kill a man is recognized by all as evil, but in the course of a just war, to kill when necessary is sanctioned by all. We wage holy war, using every available means to bring the ideal into the present. A tenuous thread keeps this world in balance, and we, Mr. Wroth, are that thread. Without us the world would drift back toward chaos as surely as a tide leaves the bay. Our actions will ultimately save the lives of millions of people.”

The Nine remained silent as Senator Wroth rose from his chair and walked around the table—twice.

“By this encounter it seems you have given me only one choice. I doubt you will allow me to return to my old life now.”

“You are correct, Mr. Wroth,” Number One said, rising. “You can never go back to the life you knew or had dreamed of. That option was eliminated when we revealed ourselves to you.

“But would you?” He smiled at the senator knowingly.

“We are actually offering you three choices. I urge you to join us. I am the eldest of The Ten, and barring some unforeseen event, I shall be the next to pass. You will be my apprentice and specialize in influencing politics, although you will also train in the other two arenas in case you should be needed to replace someone else. Politics and control are your love. Join me, and you will discover how to influence world events in ways you have never dreamed of.”

The not-yet-dead soul in Number One grew more animated.

“You will continue in your political circles, but with a new agenda. You may even keep one or two trusted advisors—bound to the same code of secrecy. And you will spend increasing amounts of time with us here, where the real nerve center is. You will be a free man, bound only by your covenant with the other nine.

“But we do offer two other choices. Through the centuries some have chosen not to accept our offer. Yet since we have taken their old lives from them, we feel responsible to provide an alternative. You may choose, then, to live a life of obscurity in the surroundings of your choosing, under constant audio-visual surveillance and subject to instant death through an implanted

device should you attempt to expose us. This would be a life of ease, free from all worry, in which you would have anything you want. And you may take anyone with you into exile as our gift to you. We do not want you to be forced into choosing us.”

“And my third choice?”

“Death. Strange as it may seem, a few souls have chosen this path, citing preservation of honor or some other archaic value.

“You have twenty-four hours to decide.” The old man grabbed a cane and began hobbling out of the room. “We will discuss your decision over dinner tomorrow night at eight o’clock,” he said as he departed.

One by one the others left, Senator Wroth guessed by degree of importance. Number Three stood but did not leave.

“I will show you to your room,” he said. “You will find it quite well-equipped.” He led Senator Wroth to another long corridor and up a flight of stairs.

“There’s a tuxedo in your closet for tomorrow’s dinner. It should fit you. There is also a phone on which you may call Ms. Hayes to inform her you will not be returning to your hotel. We know she is expecting your call.”

“Aren’t you afraid she might have the call traced to here?”

“My dear chap, what do you think we are? Bumbling idiots? All our phone lines are untraceable—our technology is more advanced than that of your National Security Agency.”

“But Number One—he used different phone booths to place calls to our senators over the years.”

The Englishman chuckled. “Number One is an old-fashioned, daring fellow. He still enjoys direct involvement in planting clues. Our technical staff told him he could call from here and have the line encoded with the phone booths’ numbers, but he likes doing it the old-fashioned way when he can, and this is how he led you to us.”

“He’s been planting these calls or clues for me to follow all these years?” Senator Wroth asked, incredulous.

“Number One is a patient man. We all are. You have to be when you do what we do. We plan in decades and centuries. That was the only mark against you in your file—too rash. But you will learn to be patient by keeping the goal in sight.

“I must inform you that we will monitor you constantly while you are here. Do not try to escape. This neighborhood breathes the very air of The Ten. You would not make it out of the building, but if you did, you would be eliminated in seconds.”

As they arrived at Senator Wroth’s spacious room, Number Three suddenly warmed and extended his hand to Senator Wroth, who received the sincere welcome.

“My dear man, I like you a lot, and I hope you make the right decision. I know this is all a little startling—it was for each of us when we were chosen. Please do consider joining us. We all like you. I was the one who recommended you.

“There have been fewer than seven hundred members of The Ten since 383 AD. You stand on the verge of becoming one of the most influential men in the last sixteen hundred years and one of the ten most influential in your generation.

“Good night,” he said, leaving the senator to his thoughts.

Senator Michael Wroth stood another moment, formulating plans within plans.

*One in seven hundred isn’t good enough. And I didn’t come here to be one in ten, either—but it may be a place to start.*

He picked up the phone to call Marlene.

# FIFTEEN

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*The most demanding stage of a quest is starting.  
From that point on, at least you have momentum.*

—Ruth Grant

**At the April** joint meeting of campus fellowships, Christopher preached with deep conviction to the packed audience in USC's Taper Hall.

John and Nic stood at the back of the auditorium, watching.

"And he thinks there's no basis for me calling him Napoleon," said John. "Look at the little guy stir their hearts!"

"Not the little guy," Nic whispered back, "but the Spirit of the Almighty within him! I love it when he's like this."

Passion for Christ's cause flowed through Christopher in the Spirit-filled ecstasy of preaching God's Word. He was beyond himself—speaking with God's anointing. And God used his words to pierce the souls of those listening, stirring them to heart-felt obedience. The students sat transfixed in the tiered seats of the auditorium.

"... If you had been on that mountain in Galilee two thousand years ago, sitting at the feet of Jesus when He said, 'Go, disciple all nations,' would you have had any doubt regarding God's will for your life? College seniors, do you really wonder what God wants to do with that degree you are about to receive? Freshmen, sophomores, juniors—do you still have any question about why you're in school right now?

"Don't rest this week without settling the question of your obedience to the Great Commission. The unreached peoples of this world beckon to you with unparalleled urgency. Get in on what God is doing in this generation. Join a missions agency that will help you apply your skills, degree, and experience to enter limited access countries with the gospel and launch movements of God. There are many good organizations out there.



“If the Lord so leads you, consider joining our fledgling Kingdom Preparation Force. Give us a year, starting this summer. We will help you raise financial support for this venture. And while I can’t offer you any guarantees, I do hold out to you the experience of a lifetime—an honest, whole-hearted quest to finish world evangelization. It will be tough—we’re going to the edge of darkness!”

Christopher wiped a tear from his eye, sat on the front of the stage, and leaned toward the crowd. His hoarse voice was reduced almost to a whisper.

“The bottom line of the Great Commission is this: if you are not obeying the call to be a part of God’s mission to the nations, you are living a disobedient life! We must all go or sacrificially help those who do. This is a war for which everyone must be mobilized. The enemy is fighting *to the death*. Are we willing to *lay down our lives*? Going *without reservation* must be *normal* for us! We must press forward until there is *no place left*! Will you consecrate yourselves for one last push?”

Across the back of the stage a large banner proclaimed: #NoPlaceLeft2025. Soon the dim auditorium was awash with the glow of mobile phones. Students around the room grinned at one other as they tweeted #NoPlaceLeft2025, urging their friends to join them in this new effort for no place left without the gospel.

As the crowd filtered out, some left in silence. Others took the information Professor Steward had at the back door. Several worked their way through the crowd to ask questions or seek prayer from Christopher or other members of the Kingdom Preparation Force. Long lines grew in front of both Christopher and John, whom many knew from his classes. People left changed—broken, convicted, inspired, encouraged, resolved, some even angry—but definitely not the same.

As the praying and sharing continued, a nondescript girl made her way from the back of the room and shyly waited to speak with Chara. She struck Chara as someone who would be easy to miss in the crowd, but something drew Chara to her.

“Hi. I’m Chara.”

The girl’s eyes met Chara’s only for an instant before she looked down again.

“I’m Ruth. Ruth Grant,” she said as she stretched out her hand. Her voice was so quiet Chara could barely hear her.

“What did you think of tonight, Ruth?”

“Wow, it was awesome,” she muttered timidly. “God has already been working in me, speaking to me about these things, but I haven’t heard anyone express it so clearly until tonight. God really speaks through that man. I feel, well ...”

The girl looked around uncomfortably. Chara could tell this was difficult for her.

“Hey, would you like to pop over to Common Grounds to talk privately? I think I can get a little time off now.” Chara grinned.

“That sounds ... great. I’m a little shy around large groups.”

Chara texted Christopher that she was heading to a quieter spot to talk with one of the students. Slipping into the nippy southern California evening, the two women talked more freely.

“So you came to know Jesus three years ago, huh?”

“Yeah. You could say my burden to share the gospel is stronger than my bashfulness. It’s been a kind of quiet evangelism—joining the math club, getting to know non-Christians, and trying to share my faith with them one by one,” replied Ruth.

The two women ordered cappuccinos and found the same warm corner that had witnessed so many late night discussions among Christopher, John, and Nic.

“What has God been telling you?” Chara asked.

“Well, several of my friends have followed Jesus through my witness, but I find myself longing for more.” Ruth struggled to put her thoughts into words. “The last several weeks I haven’t been able to get my mind off the world’s needs, especially the needs of frontier missions—cutting-edge missions. What your husband described tonight is exactly what God has been putting on my heart. These 3,227 UUPGs! But ...”

She paused, summoning her courage for full transparency.

“But something’s holding you back?”

Ruth looked straight into Chara’s eyes as if she had known her for years. Her eyes brimmed with tears.

“I’m petrified! Have you ever known what God wanted you to do but were terrified of actually doing it?”

we had no job prospects, no guarantee of our new church plant surviving, a kid on the way—you name it. I knew this was what God wanted, but I went through some times of real panic.”

“That’s how I feel. What if I join the KPF? How will I support myself? What will I do? How will I adapt to a new culture? How will I learn the language? What will my parents think? Will I ever get married?”

“Wait a minute, Ruth. I told you I have felt like this before too. The most important thing I’ve done in these situations is go back to the basic question: ‘What does God want of me?’ If I know what God wants, then all those other questions will work themselves out. But when I have made my obedience contingent on God answering my personal questions first, it has never worked out.”

“But you don’t know my parents! My mom—she already thinks I’m a religious fanatic.”

“You’re right. I don’t know your earthly parents.”

Chara reached across the table and took Ruth’s hand.

“But I do know your heavenly Father. Just listen to His voice—whether it’s to get a job, join the KPF, or some other step. Let’s pray right now.”

“Chara,” Ruth said after they finished praying, “I’m graduating in May—wow, that’s only a month and a half away. I want to join your group and help you get it off the ground. I know that’s what God is saying. But I have one big fear.”

“Which is?”

“My parents! Would you pray for me as I break the news to them? There’s no telling what my mom will say. And my church back home? They will never understand me.”

\* \* \*

It was midnight before the six reconvened at the Owens’ home. Christopher could tell the group was jubilant. The seeds of a movement had been planted that evening.

Excitement had been palpable in Taper Hall. Conversations with students had gone better than expected. The few who had made solid commitments were an encouragement, along with the many others who had said they would pray seriously over

the next few weeks about joining the KPF.

“Uh, esteemed collaborators, I don’t want to douse our fire,” John said hesitantly, “but how are we going to storm the gates of hell with just six students?”

John’s question shattered the excitement.

“I may be rather naive,” Stacy said quietly, “but Gideon had only three hundred with him, and he conquered an army he couldn’t number. Jesus started with twelve, and one of them was a dud. The six of us plus these six students gives us more than Jesus left behind. If God wants to storm the world with just twelve individuals, I think He’s strong enough to do so!”

The other five knew Stacy wasn’t talking from naivete. She had a deep, simple trust in God’s Word and understood from personal experience that God is fully faithful and trustworthy.

“I apologize,” John said. “Sometimes my rationalism overrules my faith. I don’t want to quench what the Spirit is doing. You’re right, Stacy. Six is enough if that is all God gives us. The Lord is able to save, whether by many or by few.”

“Oh! That reminds me,” Renee said. “I was talking to Timothy and Grace about our vision, and they are eager to set up a system to organize our little troop if we will get the right software and hardware. They really want to be a part, especially by using their programming skills.”

“Great!” Christopher said. “Two more. Let’s meet together next week to begin laying the foundation. Nic, we’ll really need your planning skills. Otherwise, we are going to have people committed to us but nothing for them to do yet. Learn all you can about how various missions organizations are organized.”

“And John, find out how enduring movements in history have structured themselves. Let’s learn from others. When people say ‘yes,’ we need a structure that will train and support them in practical, biblical ways that lead to church-planting movements. It’s only through movements that the remaining people groups will be reached.

“Let’s pray earnestly for God to raise up people who have the skills to get us mobilized for action. Timothy and Grace Wu are a great start. If God has been merciful to raise up laborers, then He will also provide the equipping and organization we need.”

“Chris, buddy,” Nic interrupted, “I’ve heard that other leaders set a daily alarm for 10:02 to pray Luke 10:2 like this: ‘Lord of the harvest, we beg You earnestly to send laborers out into Your harvest, starting with me as you did with your first disciples.’ Is this something we could do?”

“This could make a huge difference for our goals!” agreed Christopher. “What do the rest of you think?”

“I’m in!” Renee said as she pulled out her phone and set the alarm. Everyone agreed and followed suit.

\* \* \*

Before heading to bed that night, Christopher tweeted:

**Today, a Kingdom Preparation Force was born to assault hell’s gates. Set a daily alarm at 10:02 & pray Lk 10:2 for workers. #NoPlaceLeft2025**

He breathed deeply and shot a quick prayer heavenward. *Father, my team will charge the gates of hell with me. But how far will we get without someone experienced? We need outside eyes to give us strategic counsel beyond our collective years and experience. Help us!*

# SIXTEEN

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*Perhaps the most difficult step in any quest is the second one.*

*The first step is in the light, but the second in the dark.*

*We need help to walk untrodden paths.*

—Ruth Grant

“**Now tell me again** who it is we are going to hear?” Win Dunbar said gruffly as he and Jeanie drove through the cool, dry Arizona night. “I had to cancel a battle with Sam Murchison that took me weeks to schedule! He’s got a Hunnic army that’s hard to beat.”

“Honestly, Winthrop, your memory is like a sieve unless it has to do with battles and strategy. Tonight we’re going to hear Nicolas Fernandez talk about the new mission work his church in L.A. is starting. He’s Helen’s son, grew up in the church here, and everyone is real proud of him.”

“But Jeanie ...”

“Winthrop, we need to be there. For three years I’ve been wanting to get more involved at Grace, and Helen has become a special friend. She’s so excited about Nicolas being here, and asked especially that we come. She thinks you’ll like Nicolas.”

“Jeanie, you know me. I can stare down the toughest sergeant and stand up under the most abrasive general. But when it comes to these”—he searched for the right word—“*spiritual* types, I feel helpless. Geez, honey, a *missionary*? I’ll be completely out of my element!”

Jeanie looked at her husband fondly, knowing him better than he did himself.

“Don’t worry, dear. Others may not see it beneath your crusty exterior, but you have a deep love for God. You don’t need to feel intimidated. Just give Nicolas a chance.

“By the way, I told Helen the four of us could go out for coffee afterwards.”

The colonel didn't respond. He would rather be speared on the wargaming table.

\* \* \*

If Nic Fernandez possessed one thing, it was entrepreneurial zeal. Everyone remained attentive during the thirty minutes he had paced the stage.

"And so we now have twenty people committed to planting strategic beachheads to become church-planting movements, and that number is growing every week as word spreads. Pray that God will lead us in how to organize and prepare as Christian commandos in harsh lands. Satan has thrown up a big smokescreen for years to make us think he's too big to conquer in some of these places.

"Yet we know that a handful of wise and discerning people dedicated to God and empowered by the Spirit of God Himself can shatter the gates of hell—even in countries like these. We're small, but we're determined not to turn back even in the face of overwhelming odds. This is the final assault. We will see it through. This is the beginning of a movement that won't end until there is no place left without the gospel!"

Win had been doodling on an offering envelope but suddenly sat erect.

"We need some of you to give to support these missionaries. Maybe you heard your parents or grandparents talk about the sacrifice their family made to support the war effort of their generation. This is the greatest war effort. Let's make whatever sacrifices are necessary for those yet to hear the good news."

As Nic closed in prayer, Colonel Dunbar didn't bow his head. At that moment he was simply Winthrop Dunbar, child of God—clay in the Potter's hand.

Afterward at the coffee shop, the colonel kept reflecting on what Nicolas had said that evening.

"Nicolas, I know how excited you can get," he heard Helen say. "Are you sure you know what you're doing? It sounds to me a little like a cult. I mean twenty people can barely impact one city, much less reach the whole world. Maybe you should set your sights a little lower."

“It can be done,” Win blurted suddenly.

The others looked at him in surprise.

“What do you mean, Win?” asked Helen.

“Just a minute, Helen. Nicolas?”

“Yes, sir?”

“You mentioned Christian commandos. What did you mean?”

Nic paused, thinking.

“Well, I guess we’ve concluded that the key to completing the Great Commission is to penetrate every unreached people group with small, highly committed teams that will start multiplying disciples and churches as beachheads and then move on. We see our role as blazing a trail for others to follow—sort of like special forces in the military.”

“These people you are recruiting,” the colonel said, studying Nic, “what’s their commitment like? What do they expect to do?”

“None of us knows what we will do. We’re just starting. We just know we want to penetrate people groups with the gospel by any and every means God gives us. We’re trying to find folks who can guide us into what to do. As far as commitment, well ...”

Nic turned and spoke gently to Helen. He hoped she would understand, but he knew these would be difficult words for any mother to hear.

“I don’t want to upset you, Mom, but we’ve agreed that we’re willing to lay down our lives. I know it’s not common but it is ... uh ... appropriate. An uncommon but appropriate sacrifice for the cause of Christ—that’s what it is. We serve an unstoppable God, and no one can take our lives from us unless He allows it.”

Nic turned his attention back to the colonel.

“Commitment, sir? We are unconditionally committed to the greatest cause and the most worthy Master the world has ever seen! Some of us may even die. We are willing for even that if it means the salvation of the nations!”

Excitement burned in the colonel’s eyes.

“Then I say it again. It can be done. For years I have trained and led small, elite teams of commandos into difficult missions I am not allowed to discuss. Some seemed impossible. But we always succeeded. Why? Because we were Americans or had great weapons? Spare me.”



He gently pounded his fist on the table.

“We succeeded because we were trained to succeed even to the point of death. We had a single focus—to beat the enemy no matter the odds. We entered hostile situations more determined to win than our enemy. Sometimes we achieved our goals only at great loss of life, make no mistake about that. But everyone in these missions knew the risks and was prepared to lay down his life for the team and the cause.

“Now you tell me you want to do the same thing in spiritual missions. I say it can be done! If I took young men and turned them into an invincible fighting force for a secular cause, why can’t it happen for a greater spiritual cause?”

“I haven’t felt drawn to most churches. My faith has always been more personal, partly because most churches are made up of people half-heartedly pursuing goals not worth giving their lives for.

“But when Christians come to grips with the God we serve, and we dedicate ourselves to Him as the King of kings, our churches will begin to look like my special forces units, with greater intensity and truer sacrifice—tempered by love.”

Jeanie nudged her husband. “Winthrop, don’t be so hard.”

Win ignored her. “Now you tell me you have a group ready to take on the world? To lay down their lives? To risk everything for the King of kings? As a military man, I have been willing to lay down my life to follow my commanding officer, a mere man. How repulsed do you think someone like me is by Christians who aren’t willing to lay down their lives for the Commander in Chief of the universe?”

“Instead, we argue over whether we have to tithe pre- or post-tax income. We complain if we are called on to go to too many meetings. We’re not called to anything glorious, and so we make no glorious sacrifices. We have robbed our faith of our call to sacrificial commitment! We’re not real community, we’re not real people, and we’re not real significant in this world!”

Colonel Win Dunbar poked a large finger into Nic’s chest.

“Get this straight, young man. People are willing to lay down their lives if there is something worth laying them down for. I should know. I’ve trained them for years.”

Nic grabbed the colonel's hand and shook it with both of his. "Christopher Owen says the same thing, in just so many words! He's the one leading this endeavor."

"Sounds like the man I need to meet. This is the way missions ought to be done, the way church ought to be done. Son, don't let anyone discourage you. By God's help, you can do it. If I could do it with earthly authority, you can surely do it with heavenly authority. We fought against other human beings—our equals in some respects. But the forces you fight in God's power are just a creation of the God we serve. There's no contest there."

"That's right, Colonel. But we have a very real problem. When our country's commander in chief wants to accomplish a mission, we have people like you to train the special forces for military missions. But when my commander in chief orders me or our other teammates to complete a mission, look what He has to work with! None of us knows the first thing about developing this type of force. My friend Christopher has a grand strategy and is an inspiring leader, but he's never been down this path before. He'll keep us on course, but we don't know how to even set sail!"

Win paused and looked at Jeanie long and hard.

"I know that, son," he said. "That's why we're moving to L.A. To help you—if you'll have us."

"What?" Jeanie gasped, choking on her coffee. "Do you know what you're saying, Winthrop? You have never been comfortable around church people."

"I know what I'm doing, Jeanie. We've made a lot of moves in our lives, but none as significant as this one. I'm in my element with these folks. They're my kind of Christians. I've not found such before."

He turned back to Nic.

"Nicolas, I know strategy and tactics. I know how to train for a task. I know how to lead men into battle. If you give me your priorities for the missions, I will train your folks and lead them. If your teams are willing to pay the price, I can train them. We'll find the best missions tactics out there and implement them.

"But let me warn you," he looked at Nic sternly. "I won't be any easier on KPF members than I was in the military. If

anything, I might be tougher—the stakes are higher.”

Colonel Win Dunbar stood to his feet, giving full respect to the young man seated before him.

“The U.S. military may have no more use for a sixty-five-year-old has-been colonel. But I am at your service, sir, if you will have me.”

Nicolas stood and shook the colonel’s again.

“Don’t call me ‘sir,’ please. You’ll meet the real ‘sir’ in L.A. When can you start?”

The colonel made a quick calculation. “June first.”

“A month and a half!” Jeanie exclaimed. “I guess it’s time to start packing again! A soldier’s family must be always ready to move, again and again!”

\* \* \*

Jeanie lay next to her husband in bed. Neither could sleep.

“Winthrop, are you sure you know what you are doing? Don’t you remember what happened the last time you deployed? And the time before that?”

She snuggled closer. “It’s why we moved out West, to forget the past. Remember, he can bring you down in a moment.”

Win shook his head in the darkness. “I know ... I know. But my training has prepared me for this moment—we can’t escape that. This wounded soldier must take up service in one last cause, even though it may cost us everything.”

# SEVENTEEN

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**Senator Wroth** was flying over the Atlantic when the news he was anticipating arrived. Marlene and Jake watched the live CNN broadcast with him.

“My goodness!” Marlene cried. “How could they do this?”

“We, Marlene,” corrected Senator Wroth, glancing down at the ancient diamond now on his finger. It had been passed down from the member of The Ten he replaced, but the new band was inscribed with his successive number in that elite group. “We are now one with those who did this, and you and Jake have agreed to join me in this new venture. There’s no turning back.”

“But—but—Senator! Killing four senators and their AAs? Plus all those innocent bystanders?”

“Quiet! Let’s listen!”

Behind a somber CNN reporter, smoke was rising from one wing of the Capitol building and from the Russell Senate Office Building across Constitution Avenue. Lights from dozens of emergency vehicles flashed around the perimeters of both the structures.

“It’s sheer pandemonium here at the Capitol. Details are still sketchy, but it appears four bombs exploded simultaneously at seven twenty-three this morning. One large blast hit the senate wing of the Capitol while three others rocked the senate offices in the Russell Building next door. The majority of employees had not yet arrived. We are still waiting to learn whether anyone was killed or injured. Firefighters are battling the blazes, and appear to have the upper hand.

“The sight of our white Capitol with blackened exterior and the senate office building in flames is overwhelming. No one knows yet if this is another terrorist attack like that on 9/11. This, just on the heels of the recent deaths of two senators ... hold on a moment ...”

The reporter’s face darkened as he listened to his earpiece. “We have unconfirmed reports that four senators and some of

their staff may have been near the blasts. No names have been disclosed. Again, these are unconfirmed reports.”

Senator Wroth turned to Marlene.

“Get me a phone connection to report that I am safe and sound at home. Make sure the call is routed through my unlisted home line.”

In minutes Senator Wroth was reassuring an officer that he was at home and okay, and that he could be reached there until further notice.

“Technology is wonderful,” said Senator Wroth as he finished the call.

“Marlene, we’ll be on the ground around noon. I want a news conference set up for three this afternoon. Jake, did your men get everything set up in my office?”

“Yes, sir. They checked the other senators’ offices last night and determined what type of explosives The Ten were using. We set up an identical bomb with a faulty detonating device in your office. If the D.C. bomb squad is any good, they should have it sniffed out before your news conference.”

“I hope so, Jake,” Senator Wroth replied, “for your sake. We can’t afford any mistakes. You don’t know what it took for me to persuade The Ten to let you live as part of my team. I’m sorry about your twenty-four friends. Both of you need to understand we are playing hardball now. If we stay ahead of everyone else, we can beat these guys at their own game. But one mistake, and we’re all history. Don’t assume anything. Check, double-check, and triple-check everything. Build three or four alternate plans into every action so that no matter what happens, we’ll always come out on top.

\* \* \*

Late that afternoon Senator Wroth stood silhouetted against the crippled Capitol and Russell Building. With cameras rolling, he spoke briefly to an audience hungry for leadership.

“Today we witnessed the most appalling event in America since 9/11—a deliberate attack upon the senate of the American people. Rescue workers are still sifting through rubble looking for survivors while investigators search both buildings for more

bombs. Approximately two and a half hours ago, I was informed that dogs had sniffed out a bomb that failed to detonate in my own office.

“Just last week two senators and some of their staff died, and I pledged to the American public that, if there were foul play, those responsible would be brought to swift justice. I imagine this bomb in my office was to deter me from that pursuit. It will have exactly the opposite effect. *We will* get to the bottom of all of these deaths.

“These latest attacks on our public servants strongly suggest terrorist involvement. Whoever you may be, if you are listening to my voice right now and think you can scare us off your trail, know that we will track you down and you will be brought to justice!

“Amidst our shock and our mourning, I urge our president to immediately establish an anti-terrorism task force with sweeping executive powers to coordinate not only the investigation of these murders but also the preparedness of America to deal with such atrocities. Apparently the measures taken since 9/11 are still inadequate. This task force must be empowered to cut through red tape and implement rapid changes so that you—the American people—can sleep securely at night without fear of terrorist activity. This task force must be empowered to eradicate terrorism no matter where it is—at home or abroad.

“You, Mr. President, are the commanding officer of our armed forces. When a military emergency arises, we have vested you with authority to mobilize and commit U.S. troops even before notifying Congress. Mr. President, we are at war again.

“Fellow Americans, this assault has shaken our country to its core. I, for one, support whatever action our president may feel necessary in response to this crisis. And I call on you to join me.

“From my own family estate I now pledge twenty-five million dollars for this task force. Let others who want to contribute send their donations, in care of the White House, designated for an anti-terrorism task force.

“Commit the forces of our government, Mr. President, until there is no rock under which terrorists can hide from the long arm of the most powerful nation on earth. We stand with you!

Let terrorists not soil this pure land of liberty! Though the nations fall into chaos and upheaval, we will stand tall as a haven of peace! Let us awake from our lethargy! God bless America!”

By day’s end, Senator Michael Wroth was a household name, and the common enemy to which the senator pointed galvanized the American people to solidarity and action. Americans were so stirred by Senator Wroth’s challenge that the president’s speech later that day was anticlimactic. Thousands called the White House to support the president in implementing Senator Wroth’s proposal, and tens of millions of dollars were pledged to track down the terrorists.

It was thus no surprise that the following day the president announced Senator Wroth’s appointment as head of the newly formed Anti-Terrorism Task Force, with broad executive powers unparalleled by any other cabinet member. Senator Wroth was catapulted into the spotlight as a national hero.

\* \* \*

Number Ten spent much time traveling abroad—ostensibly to investigate terrorist activity in foreign countries. This allowed him time in Rome. Within weeks he was reviewing changes in the worldwide political scene and observing developing trends with Number One. And when he wasn’t in Rome, he found that many of his duties and studies as a member of The Ten could be carried out in Washington.

Soon after Number Ten began studying under Number One, the elderly man reprimanded him in his thin, raspy voice.

“Number Ten, I am concerned about your public involvement in America, especially your recent actions to become more prominent in the eyes of the American people. I thought you understood the value of influencing without being seen or heard. This new development disturbs me greatly.”

“Yes, Number One, I see that I acted a little rashly. I should have consulted you. But I was so new and unacquainted with The Ten’s procedures. However, I think my rising popularity can help carry us toward the Rebirth. The founding Three envisioned a day when The Ten would rule visibly. At some point we must move into the public arena. I have set up a scenario in which we

may do so.”

Number One picked up a heavy, bound sheaf of reports, shuffled to Number Ten’s side, and plopped the packet on the desk next to him. A crooked old finger pointed to the pile of reports.

“These are last month’s reports from every major political sector in the world. Your name figures prominently in many of them. Young man, you are making the same mistake the rest of us did in our early days. You must realize that we—The Ten—do not yet have enough consolidated power to go public. When we do go public, it must be with an invincible hold on the world. And that will be a decision we all make together.”

The crooked finger jabbed Michael in the chest. “No one of The Ten has a right to bring us public before our time. Do you understand?”

Number Ten gathered his thoughts and responded with that swift agility that confounded his enemies. “I understand that clearly, and I intend nothing of the sort,” he said reassuringly.

“It is only I who have gained prominence. I have not hinted in any way at the existence of The Ten. I would not be so foolish as to make that blunder, Prime Director. All I have done is lay some groundwork through which we may consolidate our power for the future. This is the goal of every decision we make. Of course I know who masterminded the deaths of the six senators, and of course I am not going to expose us.

“In the scenario I am pursuing, we will frame a terrorist group that acts contrary to our purpose. Not only will this bring more power to us, it will also eliminate one of our obstacles.”

Number One sat at a large mahogany desk, fingertips together in contemplation.

“Yes, this will serve our purposes. Your error has been in not consulting me first, but we can use this move to our advantage.”

He looked at Number Ten intently.

“But *not* to go public. We will not be ready for that for a long time—surely not in my lifetime and probably not in yours.”

Number One leafed through several reports, then handed one to Number Ten. “Here. This is the terrorist cell to frame. Our people will assist you in tying the evidence to them.” He finished



Number Ten hesitated before leaving.

“Number One, it has been sixteen hundred years since The Ten was formed. Is it possible that, over the centuries, lethargy has set in? Perhaps even a self-fulfilling expectation that the Rebirth must take place in some later generation—with the result that no generation of The Ten really attempts to usher it in?”

Number One rose, walked around the desk, and once more jabbed his crooked finger into the younger man’s chest.

“Young man, such thoughts are what almost disqualified you from being chosen. When it is time for the Rebirth, we shall know it. It will be apparent in our diagramming of world events. The lines from the past will point to its time. Do not mistake our patience for lethargy. There is nothing every member of The Ten would like more than to share in ruling after the Rebirth! Now go! Do as I have instructed you!”

Though outwardly composed, Number Ten steamed inside.

\* \* \*

Three weeks later, Senator Michael Wroth strode down a hall of the Pentagon, past Secret Service agents, and into the office where the president was waiting.

“It’s time, Mr. President.”

The two men proceeded back down the hall to a dark room filled with video monitors, computers, and a large illuminated map of a Middle Eastern country.

A voice came through the speakerphone. “Roger, Desert Sheik. Roadrunner One heading to pluck Wile E. Coyote’s prize.”

“Roadrunner?” asked the president.

“A little humor, sir,” answered Senator Wroth. “You know how no one could catch the roadrunner in those cartoons.”

All eyes were on a ninety-inch, wall-mounted display showing the movement of four teams in a desert area.

\* \* \*

At 2 a.m. local time two Apache helicopters crested a ridge, swooping across the desert floor. Overhead, AWACs jammed all radar and radio transmissions. The helicopters flew swiftly over the rugged terrain for half an hour before setting down behind a

low ridge of rocks and sand dunes where low clouds and fog had cooperated by plunging the area into total darkness.

Twelve black figures slipped from the choppers to the sand and then the top of the ridge. Eyes bulging with night-vision goggles, the twelve ran silently down the other side of the hill, like huge black insects. Before them lay a small village—a perfect hiding place for a splinter group of international terrorists.

Within seconds, the commandos reached the village and slipped swiftly through the quiet streets, sure of their route and destination. Moments later, they rushed through a doorway, quickly and silently subduing everyone in the house. Most of the occupants were simply gagged and bound, while two men and a woman were gagged, bound, blindfolded, and drugged.

Again the band stole into the streets, this time carrying with them their drugged objectives. They were halfway through the village when an alarm sounded over the mosque speaker.

Lights began to dot the dark village as suddenly-alert men emerged from houses, guns in hand.

Carrying the three figures slowed the team considerably as shots rang out, whizzing past them. Ahead lay the moonless desert which held their hope for a safe escape, while behind a quickly growing posse of villagers was gaining on them.

Suddenly a villager's bullet found its mark in one of the commandos. The leader halted his team behind a vegetable cart, while two soldiers crawled on their bellies toward their fallen friend. From behind the cart, two other soldiers unslung heavy weapons and squeezed their triggers. Rockets blazed a fiery trail before exploding into the crowd. Instantly the two rescuers lifted their fallen companion and ran back to the team.

The remaining eleven carried their four burdens from the village into the black desert. A few villagers attempted to follow, but were foiled by the darkness. The team boarded the waiting helicopters, and half an hour later landed across the border to deliver their three "guests."

\* \* \*

"That's it, Mr. President!" Senator Wroth said, after the hour and a half drama.

“All four teams successfully apprehended the terrorists. Only one team was observed. They suffered one injury, and it appears that soldier will pull through. All eleven terrorists are now in the custody of the Anti-Terrorism Task Force. We expect to have them all in the United States within twenty-four hours.”

The president stood in elation. “Excellent! Wonderful work, Senator Wroth! And General, let me congratulate you also.”

“Thank you, Mr. President. But our success is due in large part to the intelligence Senator Wroth somehow obtained on the whereabouts of these bad guys. He made our job simple.”

“So he did, so he did. Michael, how did you get to the source of the senators’ murders so quickly?”

“We just had a few lucky breaks, that’s all.”

“Senator Wroth, I know you better than that. I don’t think anything you do involves luck, but I’ll leave it at that. As soon as these murderers are safely on U.S. soil, I want the two of you to join me for a press conference in the Rose Garden to announce the swift resolution to this crisis.”

Shaking their hands, the president exited with flair, flanked by his cavalcade of Secret Service agents.

\* \* \*

The next day the president declared victory to a listening nation.

“Yesterday, about 2 a.m. local time in a small Middle Eastern country, four groups of America’s finest commandos launched strikes into four remote villages under the direction of the Anti-Terrorism Task Force. Their targets? Eleven ruthless terrorists we believe to have masterminded the recent deaths of our six U.S. senators. All four teams apprehended their suspects and emerged with only one injury. And that brave soldier is in stable condition.

“Just a few hours ago, ATTF representatives arrived on U.S. soil with these eleven terrorists, now confined in a maximum security facility. Under a recent provision of Congress, the ATTF has special authority to prosecute these criminals in expedited hearings. And should they be convicted, they will be executed immediately as a warning to all terrorists around the world. We, the people of the United States, will not tolerate such attacks on

the freedom we have fought so hard to preserve.

“Guiding this investigation and operation is ATTF director Senator Michael Wroth. In two short months, he has done what many thought humanly impossible. He has more than fulfilled his promises to you, the American people. I would like him to share a few words with you now.”

Senator Wroth unfolded a paper as he stepped to the podium, then wadded it up and stuffed it into his pocket.

“That speech wouldn’t communicate what I want to say.”

Members of the press chuckled appreciatively.

“Over the last two months, I have missed a lot of days in the senate, devoting my attention instead to tracking down those responsible for the death of my colleagues. I have been consumed with finding the perpetrators of these heinous crimes. I want first to apologize to the people of California for this lapse in my senatorial duties.

“Apprehending these terrorists has been bittersweet. I hope that the deaths of my six friends ...” He wiped his eyes with a handkerchief, “... will not be in vain. May their deaths become a rallying cry for our nation—the greatest protector of freedom in the history of the world. Let us rid the world once and for all of any group that threatens the peace and freedom of mankind. Thank you!”

Senator Wroth left the platform amidst applause from the press corps and appreciation from the American public on TV.

“How did you manage to cry during your speech?” Marlene asked quietly as they walked up the Capitol steps toward the mostly repaired senate offices.

Wroth looked at her reproachfully. “Marlene, I’m disappointed in you. Don’t you believe I was moved to tears by this whole affair?”

The pair rushed past reporters into the reopened Senate Chamber. And for the first time in months, Senator Wroth was genuinely shocked. As he walked the aisle toward his seat the whole Senate—both Democrats and Republicans—stood in his honor, applauding thunderously.

Over the next forty-six days, eleven terrorists—all of them guilty of other crimes but innocent of the deaths of the six U.S.

senators—were tried, convicted, and executed for crimes against the American state. The planted evidence appeared rock solid, and the jury was unsympathetic. The last minute appeal to the Supreme Court for a stay of execution was denied. The Eleven terrorists were executed by lethal injection. And the American public felt avenged.

Freedom had a new champion.

# EIGHTEEN

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*A man digging in a field discovered a treasure  
and joyfully sold all he had to buy that field.*

*What a no-brainer decision!*

*My heart bursts with joy at the prospect  
of gaining more of You and less of me.*

*My joy is as endless as my treasure—You, Jesus, and Your Kingdom.  
I gladly sell all to know You and make You known!*

—Ruth Grant

**George Yang** spotted his friend Lance Chu chatting with Kellie Davies and other friends near the USC Tommy Trojan statue.

“Hey, Lance! Talk to your folks about the KPF yet?”

Lance’s smile almost jumped off his face. “Dude! They gave the okay!”

“Woo hoo!”

“Hey, guys. What’s up?” asked Lance’s friend Phil Young.

“Dude, haven’t you heard what’s happening?” Lance asked. “Christopher Owen has been speaking at all the campus fellowships, sending seven point shock waves throughout. He’s launched a high-powered missions group called the Kingdom Preparation Force. They’re saying we can help prepare for Jesus’ return. They’re talking 2025 as a target date. It’s kinda radical, but a lot of us are praying seriously about joining. A gap year for some, or for George and me ...,” he grinned broadly, “after graduation in a few weeks!”

Phil’s eyes widened. “What? You guys are going to skip out on getting a job to join up with some new missions group? What will your parents think?”

“My parents are good with it!” Lance smiled broadly. “It’s only for a year,” he added. “And, ya know, the job market is kinda soft right now anyway. But I’ve also been thinking. I’ve been

ten years from now. I can do *anything* for Jesus for ten years!”

“It’s not just us, Phil,” George said. “A lot of folks are signing up. Of course, it will take more than a year to finish the whole task, but we’re starting with a one-year commitment. This is the real thing, man. It fits with what we know in our hearts and minds to be *right*. Christopher Owen has been around here longer than any of us. Even Professor Steward, from the history department, is part of this.”

“Professor Steward? Really?” Phil shook his head. “If what you’re saying is true, this may be it—just what I have been searching for!”

“Uh, probably not,” George said, glancing worriedly at Lance. “This isn’t for everybody. We’ll be going places missionaries aren’t welcome. There’s a lot of risk involved.”

But Phil wasn’t to be dissuaded. “Okay. Maybe I’ll give this Christopher guy a call.”

Lance grabbed Phil’s arm, perhaps a bit too firmly. “Dude, you’ll need to move fast. Our first meeting is May 24th, a week after graduation. Make sure this is what you really want to do. It’s going to be a tough year.”

George said, “And if that’s not enough, Church in the City has been calling all of its members to make disciples who make more disciples who make more disciples. Just like the Great Commission says.”

Lance nodded. “Like it’s the pattern all Jesus-followers are supposed to have. You know, follow Jesus and fish for men.”

Kellie motioned for the three guys to come closer. “Do you guys know Ruth Grant?”

Phil raised an eyebrow. “That bashful nerd from math class?”

Kellie smiled. “Well, she’s raising havoc on campus. I’ve never heard anyone share the gospel so much. In fact, I hadn’t heard her say more than ten words until recently. But she led two sorority gals to the Lord just a few weeks ago. She’s been discipling them in the study center. And those two gals have now led so many of their sorority sisters to the Lord that they’ve formed a discipleship group in their sorority house living room.”

Lance laughed and looked around. “So that’s what happened! Now it makes sense. One of my ATO buddies was led to faith last

week by a girl in their house. He's now started a new group with several of the guys in our frat house at 6 a.m. on Tuesdays! Dude, nobody gets up at six!"

"All I'm saying," said George, "is that this call Christopher Owen is making is not just to finish the missions task. It's a call to return to biblical discipleship. They're trying to start a discipleship movement here in L.A. before they leave for the nations."

Kellie smirked as she spoke. "Ahem, my sister is Christopher Owen's wife, Chara."

George raised his hand to his mouth. "Oh my gosh! I hope I didn't say anything embarrassing!"

Kellie playfully punched him in the arm. "Yeah, I'm keeping track of all you guys say! Seriously, though, Chara is telling me that just through Ruth's touch, we have six new generations of disciples and groups! Greeks, athletes, math students, landscape workers on campus! It's crazy!

"When I think about how shy and introverted Ruth is, if the Holy Spirit can do that through her, there is hope for me—for all of us. God wants to launch a discipleship revolution through us that will touch the nations. We are going to do *there* what we are doing *here*. Ruth is proof that it can work."

She paused and nodded her head slowly. "I'm with you, Lance. I can do anything for Jesus for ten years! And my brother-in-law who's leading the charge? He's the real deal!"

\* \* \*

Sunday, May 24th, arrived. The Owens' adjoining living/dining areas were crowded with thirty-six people on chairs, couches, windowsills, and pillows on the hardwood floor. This former brainstorming center for the six original conspirators had now become the launching pad for a movement.

Professor Steward, familiar to most of the students, stood first to introduce Christopher.

"Our fearless leader and organizer is the esteemed Christopher Owen. Don't let his short stature mislead you. Beethoven was only five-foot-three, and look what he accomplished. And he was deaf, so Christopher not only has



He winked at Christopher.

“Or consider James Madison—founding father of our country and fourth president of the United States, standing just five-foot-four,” he continued. “We believe that Christopher is founding something far more significant here, not unlike ...”

Christopher jumped out of his seat and shoved John aside. “Enough already! Welcome to the first meeting of the Kingdom Preparation Force, the most hastily-organized missions force in history!”

The room erupted in cheers, applause, and laughter, releasing a bit of the nervousness many felt. Christopher’s heart rate began to come down.

“Your presence here so shortly after the KPF’s conception is very significant. In less than two months, God has stirred many to volunteer. We have interviewed and accepted only those we feel can live up to the high-but-difficult calling of sacrificial service at the ends of the earth. You are the fruit of this!

“The KPF has just one purpose—no place left without the gospel by 2025. Our calling is to prepare for the return of King Jesus by taking the good news of His Kingdom to every last UUPG on this planet.”

Christopher turned to survey the room; his eyes settling briefly on Ruth Grant before he continued.

“You will have to endure not only harsh field conditions, but our own inexperience. Think of yourselves as our guinea pigs.”

Several laughed nervously.

“But you may also receive more direct support from us than later recruits will as this effort grows. Let me introduce you briefly to the staff that will be serving you this year. Our original conspirators, to whom God gave the founding vision for the KPF, are with me here at the front. First my wife Chara and myself. Then many of you know Professor John Steward from school, and some of you have met his wife, Renee, a practicing lawyer. Finally, Nic Fernandez, entrepreneur, and his wife, Stacy.”

“In the back are Timothy and Grace Wu.” The couple smiled as Christopher motioned in their direction. “The Wus are our IT and communications specialists. They will help us stay on top of communications and monitor our efforts among the unreached.

Everyone I've mentioned so far also plays an important part in the church I was pastoring—Church in the City. With our church's support, Chara and I are taking a sabbatical this year as part of launching this endeavor.

"Next to the Wus are Frank and Clarisse Howard." The pair next to the Wus waved. "They have prior overseas experience and will be leading one of our field teams.

"In addition to our staff," Christopher said, pointing toward a slender girl in a back corner, "Julie Konami is a recruit and, like several of you, just graduated from USC. But she has also shown a servant heart as my assistant at Church on the City over several years. I will be relying on her as a liaison in communicating with the rest of you. If she comes asking you for something or delivers a message, it will be on behalf of our staff.

"Our staff of twelve is committed to training, developing, and leading you. That's one of us for every two of you. Think of us as your tactical and logistical command team. We are committed to the KPF for the long term. We are only asking you to commit for one year, but in this year we are asking you to give yourself one hundred percent under our direction to seeking God's Kingdom among the remaining UUPGs.

"If you were counting, you noticed I only introduced ten of our twelve staff. Let me now introduce the final couple, Jeanie Dunbar"—Jeanie, seated next to Clarisse, waved—"and Colonel Win Dunbar.

"Colonel Dunbar has spent forty plus years serving in the military—training elite forces, directing special operations, and doing things too secret for any of us to know about. More important, the colonel loves God with all his heart and desires nothing more than to advance His Kingdom. God has graciously brought the colonel to help us prepare for spiritual battle in a way that may never have been done before. He will be in charge of your training over the next few months, and an integral part of our field operations through the rest of the year."

The imposing figure stood next to his wife.

"Colonel, why don't you share a little with the group, since they're going to get to know you *real* well?"

Colonel Dunbar stepped to the front as silently as a cat, and

gazes that met his were quickly averted. Christopher shook his hand, then the diminutive figure attempted to give the towering Marine a bear hug. He was swallowed up in the return embrace. A few chuckled before the colonel turned to face the group, commanding everyone's full attention.

"As the commander shared, my name is Colonel Win Dunbar. You may call me Colonel, or simply Win.

"Battle isn't as glamorous as it sounds from a distance. I know. I've been shot eight times and stabbed six. I've stormed more beaches than I can remember. I've dropped behind enemy lines, burrowed through tunnels in Vietnam, and disarmed countless booby-traps. I have turned thousands of raw recruits into the world's best fighting units. I've had to make countless split-second decisions about people's lives with bullets racing by me, mortar shells dropping around me, and jets strafing me. I have carried many wounded soldiers to safety even when I was badly injured. I have helped depose dictators, rescue hostages, establish beachheads for troops, and remove daunting military obstacles.

"But nothing in my life compares with what we are about to attempt together."

Win stopped to gaze around the room and let this thought sink in. Jeanie winked at him from the back, knowing how much he was enjoying this. Christopher watched him, admiring how quickly he had gained command of the group.

"No quest is so worthy as the one we are embarking upon. The eternal destinies of more than three hundred fifty-four *million* people in these UUPGs are at stake. And no other enemy is as diabolical, powerful, and entrenched as the one we face.

"Despite such opposition, I have utter confidence we will prevail. That is why many call me Win. And I do not expect to fail now.

"No goal is more worthy than No Place Left. No time frame is more compelling than 2025, and no outcome more ultimately certain. Our omnipotent heavenly Commander has declared that this gospel of the Kingdom *will* be preached in the whole world to every nation. If the Lord of Hosts is with us, who can be against us?

“In the military I always answered to a commander, and my service with the KPF will be no different. In this operation, Christopher Owen is my commander, and that is how I will refer to him. I am honored to follow his lead, and I will expect you to respect him as you respect me. We can only be effective if we have clear lines of authority. This is a military organization. I repeat—*military*. If you can’t handle strong leadership with clear authority, now’s the time to back out. Otherwise, when we say jump, you need to do it. Your very life, or someone else’s, may depend on it. On the field there will be circumstances where orders need to be followed without questioning, lest you heighten the danger to yourself and others.”

The colonel began threading his way among the listeners, whose heads swiveled to follow him.

“We pursue an objective some consider impossible. Since learning about the KPF, I have done little else besides study the practicality of NoPlaceLeft2025.

“If God is with us, and we are truly ready to lay down our lives, it can be done! I aim to be in the final generation—the one that finally buckles down to complete the conditions He gave for His return. I’ll turn seventy-six in 2025.”

The colonel grinned broadly.

“I’m not asking you now for ten years. I am just asking for your undivided, focused effort for one year. However, at the end of that year, you—the battle-hardened spiritual assault troops with field experience—will be equipped to lead new recruits for many more years to come. You are the seeds of this movement.”

The colonel continued his circuitous meandering among the recruits, forcing them to twist their necks and bodies to follow his movements.

“In preparation for harsh field conditions, your training must be rigorous. In one week we’ll officially begin the three-month KPF Boot Camp. And believe me, I know how to run a boot camp! Within a few long weeks, some of you will hate the sight of me.”

The colonel picked up a worn Bible and held it up.

“Battles are only won by those who believe they will win. Our faith must be grounded in God’s Word, so you will read through

Acts and Revelation every two weeks to give you unshakeable confidence that God will back you up in His unstoppable plan to redeem this world. Our objective will be accomplished. You need to believe that. No Marine ever wins who lacks confidence in his own abilities or in his team's. If you doubt, you will fail, so I want you immersed in God's victorious Word.

"For tactical training, you will be reading classics by Roland Allen and modern texts on church-planting and disciple-making movements. For sacrificial devotion, you'll read *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* and selected missionary biographies. You stand on the shoulders of giants. We will be finishing what they started.

"Here in the L.A. basin are pockets of the very peoples whose homelands we will be entering. This summer you will begin learning your target language, and how to reach these folks. In this boot camp, you will master just enough language to continue learning in your assigned field. Language is essential for your mission.

"After boot camp you will be divided into four teams to be inserted among four different people groups. There you will find people whom God has prepared to receive our King and His Kingdom. You will help them start churches in their own homes, which will then multiply among that people group.

"You're gonna work your tails off to have enough language to get started, and pray like crazy for bilingual national partners to help. Like the Green Berets, you will train locals to carry the mission forward after you leave. Like Paul's missionary band, you may move from place to place seeking to catalyze the kind of multiplication we see in Acts! And, like Paul, you will find ways to return to strengthen the work you have started."

A young woman in the front raised her hand.

"Yes?"

"Sir, I don't want to question your confidence, but something doesn't make sense to me."

"What is that, young lady?"

"Sir, there are already lots of missionaries out there, and they don't start churches as quickly as you're talking about. Some have been there for years without these results. So how can we expect to see results so quickly?"

“That’s a great question. You are thinking critically, and I like that,” replied the colonel.

“Some long-term workers *are* seeing churches planted much more quickly than can sometimes be reported. We are already tracking several *dozen* church-planting movements in very unreached areas. And we are learning a lot from them.

“Your role is to be missionary shock troops. We do expect you to plant multiplying churches soon after your arrival. How? By virtue of who you will have become. You will be high-risk, short-term, spiritual combat troops. You will quickly comb through hundreds, even thousands, of people to find those through whom God has prepared to launch movements. You will take risks that might get you thrown into prison, thrown out of the country, or even killed. Yet by taking greater risks, you will see greater results more quickly.

“You are going to plant reproducing churches. And you are going to cooperate with God to start movements because you *must*—not because you are better than any other worker out there. Your role is simply different.

“If we can inspire others by our humble and sacrificial example, so much the better. Yet the evil one can accomplish immeasurable damage through any KPF recruits who become proud, cocky, or unteachable.

“I have said enough. At the end of one year you will return here, Lord willing. As God leads, you will then be able to renew your enlistment or choose another course.

“At this very moment, you have friends who are accepting positions with Fortune 500 companies, starting their own businesses, or getting ready for their first day of law school.”

Win planted both feet squarely and put his hands on his hips.

“Recruits, your friends don’t know what they’re missing! With God’s help, we will hasten the fulfillment of His unchanging purpose. We will join Paul in saying, ‘There is no place left.’ And I, Win Dunbar, will stand with you to the end!”

Cheers erupted around the room.

Lance stood up.

“Yes?” said the Colonel.

Lance looked around with a bashful grin.

“Well, sir, some of the dudes here ... we were wondering ... well ... if we would get to wear green berets or something?”

Everyone laughed, including the colonel.

“No. No green berets. However, I might be able to arrange a ten-thousand-foot jump for you,” said the colonel, “... without a parachute!”

“Okay, that’s enough.” Christopher smiled and dismissed the twenty-four recruits with prayer. He and the staff had a mountain of logistical details to climb before boot camp started.

*THANK YOU for reading the FIRST THIRD of*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Steve Smith, Th.D., planted a church in L.A. similar to the one in this book. For the last two decades he has led others in starting movements among unreached people groups around the globe. His book with Ying Kai on starting movements—**T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution**—gives practical helps on implementing Biblical principles of movements. It is a best-seller, translated into more than 20 languages.*



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