



BY RANDY HURST

# Eternity

everyone's destiny

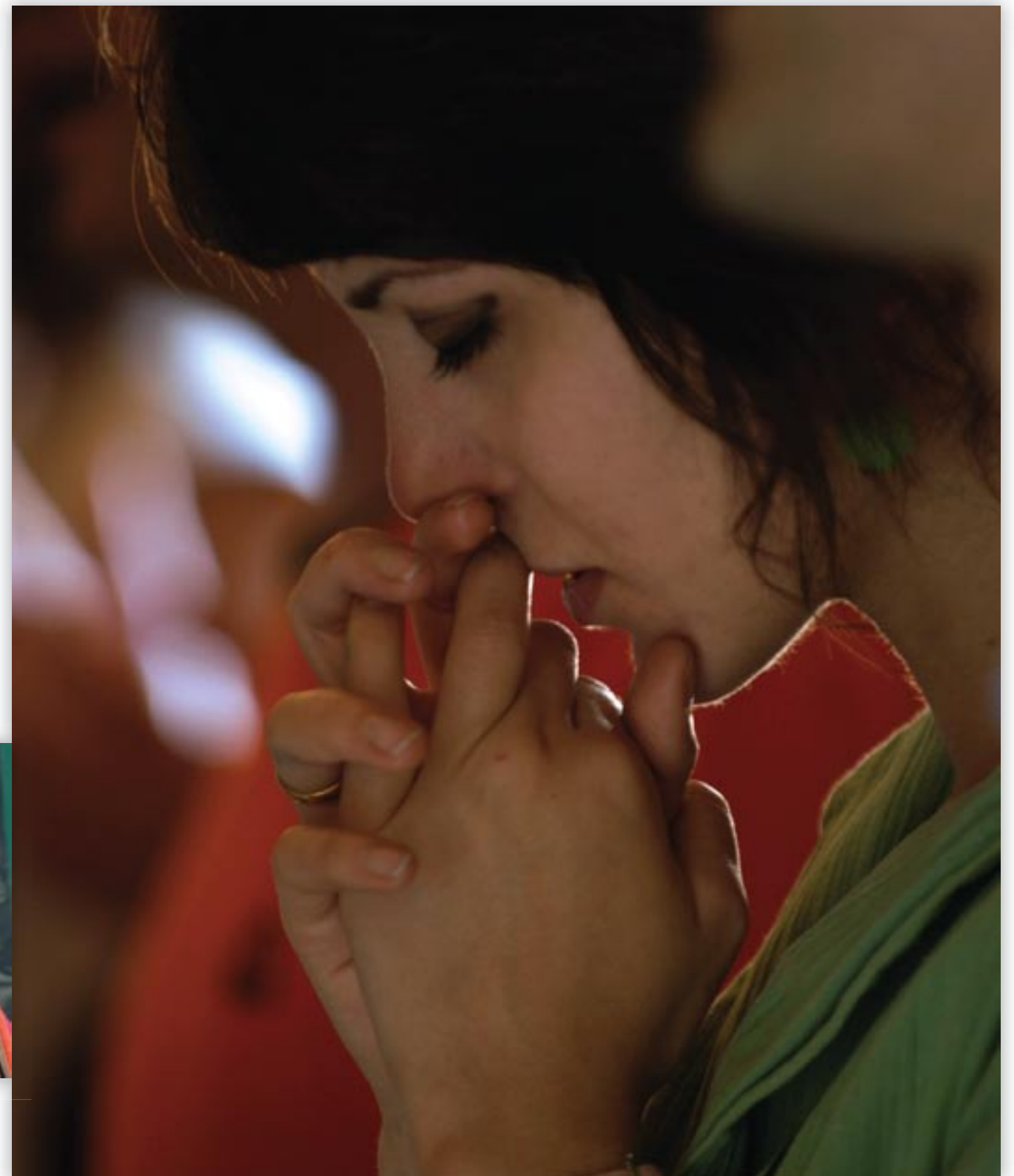
Look into anyone's eyes. Of the innumerable varieties in the wonder of God's creation the most awe-inspiring is the individual human life. Everyone on earth is a unique creation with a distinct personality. God has ordained that when life is conceived, a person becomes a living eternal soul. The truth of God's Word is clear — once a human life begins, there is no end to its existence. All the things most people seek in life — recognition, wealth, knowledge and human relationships — are fleeting and temporary. Souls are eternal.

From the time of the Early Church, many have wishfully speculated that all people will eventually, somehow, reach heaven. But the prevailing belief among Christians through the centuries is that those who do not receive salvation in Christ will suffer conscious, everlasting torment.

The influences of moral relativism, pluralism and tolerance in today's culture have blurred this once-clear truth. An alarming number of Americans who attend church believe Jesus is not the only way of salvation. Even some evangelicals embrace a variety of alternative thoughts about eternity, including the belief that everyone will ultimately be saved,<sup>1</sup> that nonbelievers will pass out of existence like animals,<sup>2</sup> and that the soul of man is not immortal and requires that certain conditions be met before it can receive everlasting personal existence.<sup>3</sup>

What we believe must be determined by Scripture alone. The apostle Paul wrote, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"<sup>4</sup> Because the judgments of an infinite and holy God are "unsearchable" and His ways "unfathomable," we can know about eternity only what He has chosen to reveal to us.

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The best-known verse in the Bible — John 3:16 — reveals the magnitude of God’s love for a lost, sinful world. But the shining hope of everlasting life for those who believe is shadowed by those perishing in darkness. “Perish” here does not mean physical death or even the end of existence, but destruction and torment that lasts forever.

Modern culture seems to have designated tolerance as the primary moral virtue and accepted the idea that anything a person believes can be a pathway to eternal life and ultimate peace. But there is only one way to peace and everlasting life with our Creator. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”<sup>5</sup> In the Sermon on the Mount, He said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus is both the door and the way.

The apostle Peter said, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”<sup>7</sup>

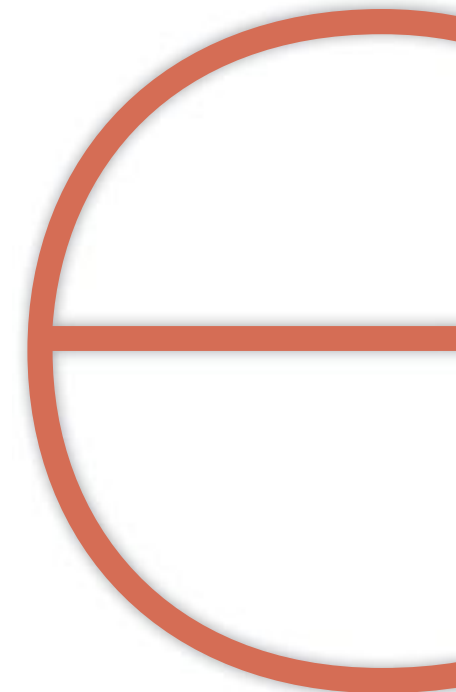
As a challenge to missions, people sometimes use statistics concerning what percentage of the population in a particular country has never heard the name of Jesus. But merely hearing Jesus’ name is not enough. Spiritually lost people must have an adequate witness of the gospel to respond to Christ’s offer of forgiveness of sin and the gift of everlasting life through following Him.

Forgiveness of sin and eternal life are not granted merely for believing in God’s existence and distinguishing right from wrong. Peace with God is obtained only through personal faith in Jesus. The issue is not religion — but relationship. “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”<sup>8</sup>

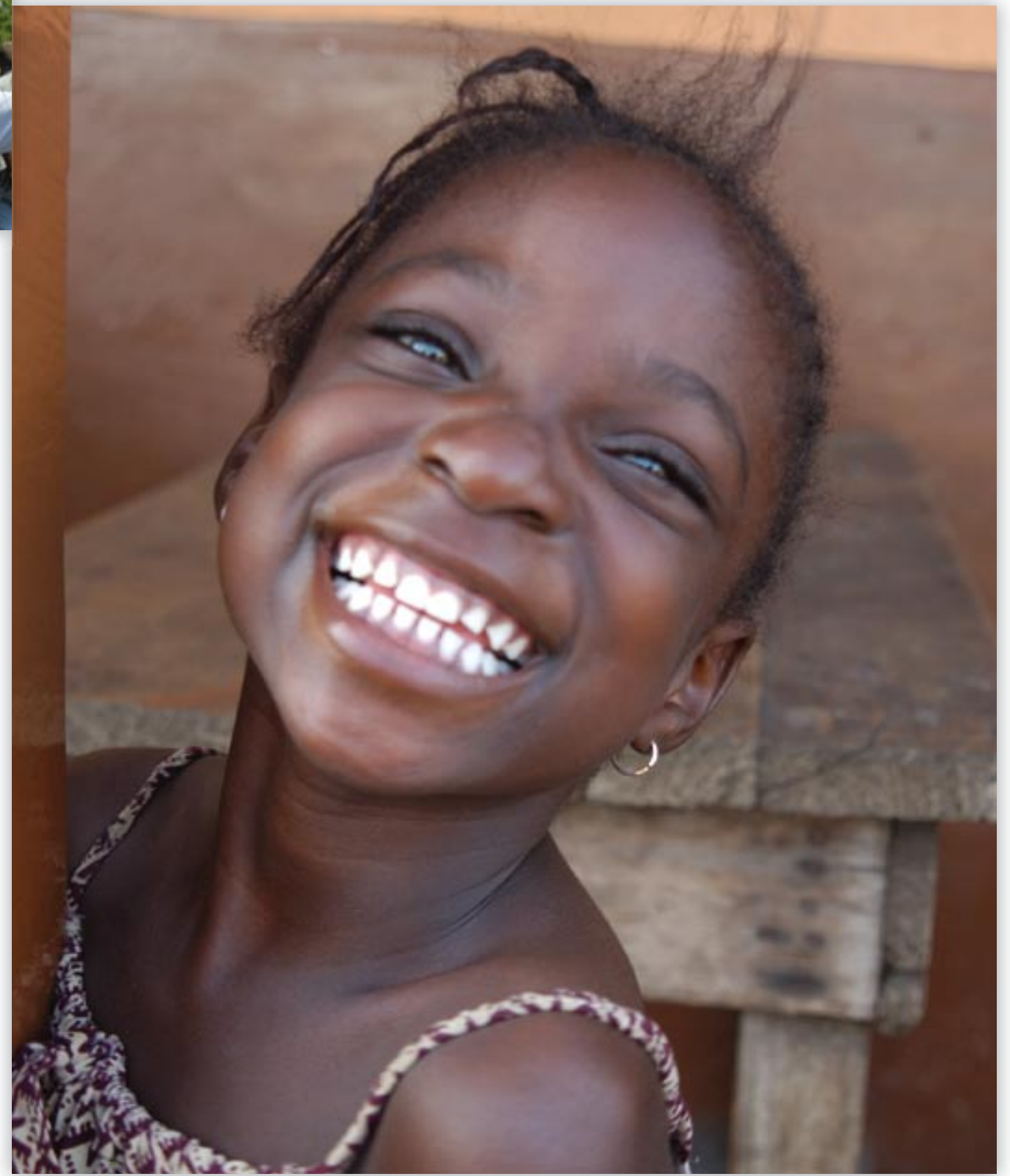
One of Jesus’ best-known teachings is the Parable of the Sower. In it, Jesus reveals the nature of spiritual harvest in God’s eternal kingdom. The seed, which is the Word of God — the message — will fall on different kinds of ground. Not all people who receive the message will respond, and not all who respond will remain. The person who “endures until the end”<sup>9</sup> will be saved.

Essentially, there are only two kinds of soil — productive soil and unproductive soil. Jesus gives three examples of each. In preparing future sowers of His message, Jesus wanted His disciples to be prepared for those who would not respond to the message as well as those who would initially respond but still fall away — in whom the life that began would eventually die.

While the conclusion of the parable emphasizes the great abundance of the harvest, what Jesus reveals about the unproductive soil is sobering and even



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frightening. Clearly, genuine spiritual life began in both the shallow and thorny soils. Yet, tragically, new spiritual life can begin in a person and still die. People can be redeemed by God’s grace and be on their way to heaven, yet become spiritually lost again.

The primary objective of evangelism is more than a salvation decision or seeing a nonbeliever pray a sinner’s prayer. It is a changed life — following Christ in obedience to His teaching and commands. If a person arrives at a salvation decision without understanding the cost of following Christ, he can begin well but fail to continue following and serving Him. The end objective is a disciple — a committed and faithful follower of Christ.

The ultimate purpose of sharing the message of the gospel is clearly described in Paul’s letter to the Colossians: “He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach — if indeed you continue in the faith, firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel.”<sup>10</sup>

Paul goes on to describe the objective of proclaiming the gospel: “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.”<sup>11</sup> Notice that the ultimate goal is that each disciple is presented before the Lord holy, blameless and beyond reproach — complete in Christ — at the end of life on this earth.

The end result of the spiritual harvest in Christ’s kingdom is about the good ground — those in whom life not only begins but also grows, lasts and multiplies.

Jesus’ admonition that “he who has ears, let him hear”<sup>12</sup> is significant. By exhorting the whole audience to listen carefully, Jesus was implying that every person can choose how they listen. Every person has the potential of being either productive or unproductive soil. If this is true, everyone should have the opportunity to hear the message and make that choice.

The gospel calls each hearer to decide and respond to the proclamation of Christ’s message. The eternal destiny of each person is at stake. The eventual state of the unredeemed is almost unspeakable, but it must be told.

Understanding what the Bible reveals about eternity confronts us with the terrible fact that even those who have not had the opportunity to respond to God’s grace will suffer eternally. The apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church that “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those

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who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”<sup>13</sup> Not only do those who are knowingly disobedient to the gospel pay the penalty of eternal destruction. So do those who simply do not know God.

We believe the words of Jesus: “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?”<sup>14</sup> He challenged His hearers with a choice — between only two kingdoms and two possible roads.<sup>15</sup> Unredeemed humanity is already on the broad road that leads to destruction. The terrible truth is that our world is thronged with lost and perishing multitudes.

Jesus vividly described people’s eternal destiny: “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. ... These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’”<sup>16</sup>

Jesus used the same word — eternal — to describe the destiny of both the righteous and the unrighteous. The difference is that believers will have eternal life; unbelievers will share the same fate as that prepared for Satan and his demonic hosts.

The horrors of hell are so great that no earthly language can do complete justice to them. By using the figure of unquenchable fire and undying worms,<sup>17</sup> Jesus chose the most horrific descriptions that human language would allow. The reality those images seek to convey should surely be understood by us to be more — not less — than the word pictures they depict.

As the torments of hell are both unimaginable and indescribable, so are the glories of heaven. Heaven is a place of eternal reward<sup>18</sup> and being in the Lord’s presence<sup>19</sup> forever.

Jesus said to John in Revelation, “To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”<sup>20</sup> A new name represents what a person has become — in character. As Jesus gave Peter a new name<sup>21</sup>, we will receive a new name also. We will finally become what God purposed for us.

Contemplating the truth about eternity should compel us to share the only message of hope for the lost — Jesus. We must tell them about their opportunity to choose eternal life. Our mission is to enter into our Lord’s work of “bringing many sons to glory.”<sup>22</sup>

An unforgettable person I encountered more than 10 years ago is a telling example of how the truth of God’s Word and the power of the Spirit can move a believer to action.



I had finished preaching on a Sunday morning in Jakarta, Indonesia, when a man from the congregation volunteered to take me to the airport in his taxi. His name was David.

Immediately after entering the stream of traffic, David said to me, “We must talk fast. We only have 45 minutes.”

I was immediately curious. I thought, *What could this man possibly want?*

“I am a taxi evangelist,” he explained. “Everyone who gets into my taxi hears the gospel.” Suddenly David reached into his glove compartment, pulled out a cassette recorder and popped in a blank tape. He handed it to me.

“What’s this for?” I asked.

“I need a 10-minute salvation sermon,” he replied. “When people get into my taxi, I always ask what language they speak.” He pointed to a rack of cassette tapes on the dashboard. Each tape was labeled with a different language. A large cassette player hung from a hook between the front and back seats. For each passenger, David played a sermon in a language they could understand.

“English is the only language I don’t have,” he told me. “God has sent you for my ministry today.”

“All right, David, I will preach a sermon for you,” I promised. “But first, I must prepare.” I closed my eyes to meditate and pray. Suddenly I heard a noise. I opened my eyes. David was driving 70 miles per hour down the freeway, praying in the Spirit for God to anoint my message — with his eyes closed!

“David! You can stop praying,” I said nervously. “I’m ready.”

I turned on the tape recorder and shared a simple 10-minute message about the life of Jesus — His divinity and sinless life, His death to pay the penalty for our sins, and His resurrection. I explained the plan of salvation and led a sinner’s prayer the listener could pray. Then I said, “If you have prayed this prayer with me and meant it from your heart, God has forgiven you and will give you a new life. If you prayed this prayer, please tell your taxi driver, David. If you live in Jakarta, he will tell you where you can find a church to help you grow spiritually.”

I stopped the recorder. I said, “There is your sermon, David. Have people received Christ in your taxi?”

“Many times,” he replied.

“Please tell me about some of them,” I said.

David shared several testimonies with me. One I will never forget. A businessman got into David’s taxi one day and asked David to take him to the

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David is still reaching taxi passengers with the gospel.



Jakarta harbor bridge. He told David later that his business was bankrupt and he planned to jump off the bridge and take his life. But that day he got into a cab driven by a “taxi evangelist” and before they arrived at the bridge, he received Christ as his Savior.

Seven years later I returned to Indonesia. At my request David met me at the airport. His hair was grayer and his taxi had more than 300,000 miles on it. But he was still sharing the message of Jesus in his taxi. I learned that the businessman who planned to jump off the bridge is a pastor today — as are two other men who received Christ in David’s taxi.

Each person will face a final, lasting judgment. Whatever a person’s destiny, it is for certain eternal. Everlasting reward or punishment awaits every person on earth. Each person will be either a glorious wonder, conformed to Christ’s image — or an everlasting horror upon which we could not bear to look.

When time stands still, we will each face Jesus — who gave His life for a lost world and commissioned us to proclaim the good news of salvation. He will examine and judge our works. Paul said, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.”<sup>23</sup>

We have been entrusted with the message that will rescue people from the domain of darkness and transfer them to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son.<sup>24</sup> The promise can be true for them that “entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”<sup>25</sup>

Before I got out of David’s taxi at the airport, I wanted to hear what motivated him. I asked, “David, why are you doing this — being a taxi evangelist?”

Tears filled David’s eyes as he replied, “I know that Jesus is coming soon. And for eternity, everyone who gets into my taxi will be in heaven or hell. I must give them the opportunity to choose.” **tpe**

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<sup>1</sup> Universalism, <sup>2</sup> Annihilationism, <sup>3</sup> Conditional immortality, <sup>4</sup> Romans 11:33, NASB, <sup>5</sup> John 14:6, NIV <sup>6</sup> Matthew 7:13,14, <sup>7</sup> Acts 4:12, <sup>8</sup> 1 John 5:12, <sup>9</sup> Mark 13:13; Matthew 24:13, <sup>10</sup> Colossians 1:22,23, NASB <sup>11</sup> Colossians 1:28, <sup>12</sup> Matthew 13:9, <sup>13</sup> 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, NASB, <sup>14</sup> Mark 8:36, <sup>15</sup> Matthew 7:13-14 <sup>16</sup> Matthew 25:41,46, <sup>17</sup> Mark 9:43-48, <sup>18</sup> Revelation 22:12, <sup>19</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, <sup>20</sup> Revelation 2:17 <sup>21</sup> John 1:42, <sup>22</sup> Hebrews 2:10, <sup>23</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:10,11, NIV, <sup>24</sup> Colossians 1:13, <sup>25</sup> 2 Peter 1:11

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