

WHAT JESUS DID

Evangelism for Everyone
7 Week Study
for individuals and groups

DAVID SOESBEE



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*Some of the names of the people in my personal stories have been changed for privacy protection

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DEDICATION

In memory of Dr. Randy Kilby (1955 - 1997)

I only had the chance to know Dr. Randy Kilby from 1994 to 1996, while I attended Fruitland Baptist Bible College. In that short time, he had a huge impact on my life. Dr. Kilby was the president of Fruitland, and the one thing I loved most about him was that he was very personable and a great encourager. He was quick with jokes, and preached with intense passion. Dr. Kilby left a large void when he passed, but, in his little time on this earth, he left an enduring legacy. Dr. Kilby was never ashamed to bring praise to Jesus whenever possible, and he led by an example that we all should follow.

I was blessed to be able to call Dr. Randy Kilby my friend.

I dedicate this book to my beautiful wife Kimberly. Baby, you shine brighter than the sun in the sky, and always bring light to my day. Next to my salvation, you are the best gift the Lord has given to me. I love you and thank you for your overwhelming support and love for me. Thank you for being my rock. I look forward to seeing what lies ahead for us in this awesome journey the Lord has placed before us.

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INTRODUCTION

I sold my first bag of pot when I was ten years old.

You might wonder: *Who'd buy drugs from a ten year old?* Younger kids who had a buck or two to buy a joint. Older kids who wanted to smoke or take a hit of speed. People who had heard from other people that marijuana was harmless.

Next you might wonder: *What kind of ten year old would start selling drugs?* One who didn't have a positive male role model in his life. One who had been secretly abused from a young age and desperately wanted to fit in so that people would like him. You see, when I was ten, I hung out at a pool hall. I didn't have much else to do, and I liked being around guys who were bigger than me. It made me feel tough. One day, an older dude came up to me and said, "Hey kid, want to make some money?"

"Sure," my eyes lit up, "what do I have to do?"

"Take this and sell it to your friends. And don't ever tell anyone where you got it."

That's all it took. There was high demand for the stuff I had, and when you start selling so young, you become pretty good at it. It brought me great popularity as a teenager. By the time I was twenty-three, I knew I wouldn't be around to see thirty. My life was heading in one direction. I knew it. I didn't much care though. I had the confidence of Mike Tyson going up against a kindergartener. I knew my time on earth was borrowed, and I knew the man who had my soul on loan. I saw his face in the dead of night. He was the echo in the words spoken by adults who wrote me off as good-for-nothing. His was the voice in my head, telling me that my life was worthless, useless, and that the lives of those around me were just as undeserving of anything good as I was. It was at his prompting and to his good pleasure that I sold drugs, drank heavily, didn't respect women, and got into fights for no good reason.

I was headed straight to hell and didn't care when it happened.

My mom tried to keep me straight. She truly did. But as a single mother battling

multiple sclerosis, and with two other kids besides me to look after, she had her hands more than full. My dad wasn't a help, and if anything, piled more grief onto my mom's already full plate. I kept my problems hidden from my mom and my siblings. I knew my mom was sick and I didn't want to worry her. I had determined that I had one person to worry about. Me. I had my first job at age eight. I smoked my first joint at age nine. And, like I said, I was selling drugs at age ten. I knew how to do whatever was necessary to exist.

I've always said I'll take street smarts over book smarts any day. Maybe I've always said that because it was my street smarts that allowed me to survive some pretty horrific things that happened during my childhood. Things that continue to haunt me when the night shadows have their way with my dreams. There are things that I will likely never forget, and, hard as I've tried, I may never get over.

School was extremely difficult for me, so when my school days were done all I had left were my street smarts and some strong drug connections that allowed me to party like nobody's business on weekends, and gave me the money I needed to do what I wanted during the day.

There was a guy I knew in high school who was on a completely different path than I was. Jamie was a star athlete and an all-around nice guy who stayed out of the party scene. Jamie always had a kind word for me. He had a wide smile that was genuine. When he would tell me, "Hey, it's great to see you!" I believed he meant it.

Jamie would often invite me to church with him on Sundays. He attended the West Asheville Baptist Church, where his dad was the head pastor. Jamie wouldn't just ask me to come, though, he offered to drive me there if I needed it. I'd smile and thank him, but I never took him up on his offer. On Sundays I was too busy sleeping in and recovering from Friday and Saturday to go to church.

But one Sunday morning, when I was twenty-three years old, that changed. For several weeks I'd had a growing discomfort building up inside of me. I'd wake up after a night of drinking and doing drugs and I felt extremely unsettled. Something was missing from my life that drugs, booze, or women wouldn't fill. On this particular Sunday morning, I decided to dig out whatever best clothes I had and go to the temple. My mom had taken us to the Mormon temple when I was little, and I wondered if I'd find some sense of balance for the turmoil in my soul if I returned there.

As I got in my car, I heard a voice in my head. It was Jamie, the guy I'd known

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in high school. In my head I heard him invite me, as he'd done so many times. I knew where the West Asheville Baptist Church was located. It was closer to the tiny trailer I lived in than the Mormon temple was, so I decided to go there instead.

As I got out of my car, I was acutely aware of how I looked. My hair was long. (What can I say? It was 1989.) My clothes weren't nearly as nice as those on the people around me. And, I'd been out partying the night before, so I looked the part of a head-banger. I felt like I stuck out worse than I'd ever stuck out anywhere before. Ever.

As I walked into the back of their temple (I didn't know it was called a church), all eyes turned to me. My hair felt longer and my clothes felt rattier than they did when I was in the car. It was as if someone had scratched their nails down a chalkboard and everyone turned at once to see who did it. A few older men and women came toward me. I thought to myself, *They're gonna kick you out of here. You don't belong here.*

The tallest man in the place reached me first. He didn't hesitate to stick out his hand, look me in the eye, and declare, "Good morning! It's so great to have you here."

I shook his hand cautiously and slowly replied, "Thank you."

Then he said to me, "You're right on time. Go on in and have a seat."

I walked to the front and took a spot in the third row. There was a choir loft up on the stage, and Jamie was there. When he spotted me, he jumped over the rail and ran to me. I was a little freaked out. But he hugged me and mirrored the sentiment of the tall guy.

"It's great to have you here," he said warmly.

He returned to the choir and I sat down. The service started. We sang some songs, and then the pastor, Dr. Johnson (Jamie's dad), spoke. For forty minutes I listened intently. I realized that what went on in this temple was significantly different from what went on in the Mormon temple. This man spoke about Jesus like he was someone you could get to know intimately. In fact, the pastor seemed to know Jesus as if he were a real person that he could talk to and hear from. I tried to process how that was possible. Wasn't Jesus dead?

What was even weirder to me was that the people all around me were giving feedback to the pastor as he spoke. In the Mormon service, we sat quietly and didn't budge or give a peep. These people were shouting, "Amen" or "Thank you, Lord," and

they were smiling and nodding along with what the pastor was saying.

These people were in some sort of club or allegiance together and it centered around Christ. I was fascinated. At the end of the service I watched as several people left their seats and went forward upon Dr. Johnson's invitation to "give their hearts to Jesus." He welcomed them to approach the altar boldly and ask Christ to give them a new life. Some were crying, some weren't. Some simply came to the front, kneeled, and prayed. Others came and talked to the pastor quietly, usually while dabbing their eyes.

As I watched, I thought to myself, "These people have issues."

I was in awe of what went on in this temple.

I was so taken with what went on there, that I went back the next week, and the next. In fact, for several weeks to follow my weekend routine involved parties on Friday and Saturday, and West Asheville Baptist Church on Sunday morning. The messages the pastor gave in his sermons would come back to me during the week. I thought about them when I was at work. His words reverberated in my head sometimes at night.

One Saturday morning I awoke with my mind swirling with questions. I had partied especially hard the night before and I felt terrible. I looked at the clock. It was ten o'clock in the morning. As I lay there, I wondered if God was real. I threw up a challenge to the air. I said, "God, if you're out there, I dare you to show yourself to me. Prove that you're real."

I continued to think about various things I'd heard Dr. Johnson say over the past weeks I'd been attending his church. What bothered me the most is that I couldn't figure out how Jesus fit into it all. Pressure began to build inside of me, and I felt frustrated at my confusion. I decided I would give Dr. Johnson a call, since he was the one who put all these questions in my head anyway.

I walked toward my telephone and it began to ring. I assumed it was one of my friends, calling to solidify our plans for that night. It was a Saturday, after all, so we needed to know who was going where, what drugs we needed, and what time we'd meet up. I decided to let my answering machine pick up the call. When the machine didn't pick up after its normal four rings, then five, then six, I thought with frustration that I needed to get a new machine. I let it ring eight times, then decided to answer the call, tell whoever it was that I'd call back, and then hang up quick so I could call Dr.

Johnson.

“Hello,” I said.

“Is David Soesbee there?” a male voice on the other end asked.

“This is he,” I replied.

“David, this is Dr. Johnson from West Asheville Baptist Church,” he said. My chest got tight, and I looked around.

Are you kidding me? I said to God.

Dr. Johnson continued, “I was praying for God to lay someone on my heart as to who I should call today, and He laid your name there. Can you come see me this afternoon?”

I went to Dr. Johnson’s home for our two o’clock meeting. I was anxious to get there because the battle that was happening in my mind was unlike anything I’d ever experienced. And believe me, my mind had been through some pretty wild things.

We sat at his dining room table. I had butterflies swirling around my insides, like when you are summoned to the principal’s office and aren’t sure why. In the short time I’d known Dr. Johnson, I’d come to respect him greatly. It was hard not to. When he spoke, he commanded the attention of his audience simply through his presence. He carried authority with a confidence that was not arrogant, but inviting. He had qualities that I’d wished I had. I was awed at how he could be so bold while speaking to a packed church. I hated speaking in front of people so much that in high school I did not hesitate to take an F on any assignment that required me to present or read in front of the class. No questions asked, I simply wouldn’t do it.

So when Dr. Johnson began explaining to me that day who Jesus Christ was and why he loved me, I listened. And when he explained why Jesus died for me, I was overwhelmed with the thought that someone would ever do something so huge for me. I knew what it meant to fight for someone else, but to have someone fight for *me*? That concept was difficult for me to grasp.

After thirty minutes or so, Dr. Johnson asked me if I wanted to accept the gift that Christ offered.

“It sounds incredible, Dr. Johnson. But, I don’t think God would want someone like me,” I responded. I truly could not imagine God wanting anything to do with me.

“That’s the wonderful thing about God, David,” Dr. Johnson replied. “He wants you exactly how you are. Right now. He just wants you to be there, and to be real.”

“I don’t think you understand,” I explained, trying to get him to realize just how unclean I was, “I have things I need to change before I could come before God. I’ve done some pretty bad things.”

“David, let me tell you something. There are things in your life that you want to change. Some of them, you’ll be able to do on your own with a lot of work. Some things will be more of a battle—you’ll struggle hard, but will get there eventually. And some things, no matter what you do, no matter how hard you try, you will never, ever change. You’ll scream, you’ll scratch, and you’ll fight, but you’ll never do it,” he paused, then asked me, “Did you see the Cub Cadet riding mower in my front yard?”

“Yes, sir, I saw it,” I replied.

“Do you think I could go out there, grab it, and roll it over?”

“Yes, I believe you can.”

“I could. But I would struggle to do it. It would take me a few tries to flip it. If you came out there and helped me, though, it would be a lot easier.”

“Yeah, we could really toss that thing,” I answered. “No problem at all.”

Dr. Johnson leaned forward and looked at me intensely as he said, “That’s what it is like when you accept Christ into your life. You no longer have to try and do things, or change things, on your own. You have the help of the most powerful man in the world.”

A lightbulb turned on in my brain. Everything I was trying to figure out about why I needed Christ suddenly became illuminated through Dr. Johnson’s explanation.

“I need that,” I declared with a certainty I’d never had about anything before. “What do I have to do to accept Christ?”

Dr. Johnson smiled. “Pray with me,” he said. “I’m going to pray, and you say the words I say. But the power isn’t in these particular words. The power is in what Christ is doing in your heart. The condition of your heart is what matters most.”

Dr. Johnson prayed, and I repeated what he said. But my mind was racing as I prayed. It was as if he was going too slow for me. I wanted to talk to God on my own, and let him know that I was ready for His Son, Jesus, to change me. I began to speak out the sins I’d committed. It was as if my spirit was spewing them out of my body, confessing everything I’d done that was vile and disgusting. I confessed the things I’d done against others and against God. I begged God to forgive me. Now, keep in mind, I’d done a lot of really awful things. So this process took a while. When I was done, I

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was crying hard. The tears and mucus that flowed from me was a catalyst. It was a release of all my sins, my pain, my anguish, and my frustrations.

I looked up at Dr. Johnson. He was crying too.

“How was that?” I asked him honestly.

“Oh, that was good,” he said.

“What do I do now?”

“Now, David, you start studying and reading the word of God. And tell people what you did, and what Jesus did for you.”

I stayed under the pastoral teaching of Dr. Johnson as I grew in my knowledge of who Christ was. Dr. Johnson was right. Changing some aspects of my behaviors and habits was difficult. But I had Christ to help me. More importantly, I was committed to allowing Him to help me. I searched out what His word instructed and I became better at learning to listen to the Holy Spirit speak to me.

A few years later, I was taking college courses to become a physical therapist. I thought that as I was helping people heal physically, I would have many open doors to talk to them about their spiritual healing. However, God had other plans. He began to show me that I was to put full-time efforts into ministering to others. This shift in focus wasn't something I entered into lightly. I told Dr. Johnson that I felt like God was calling me into a ministry of some sort. And I asked him what he thought about that.

Dr. Johnson replied, “I don't know, David, I'm not God.”

I needed a little more guidance than that. He went on, “If you can do anything else, do it. But if you cannot, then don't ignore the call of God on your life.”

I could not ignore the call. I enrolled in seminary to find out what God was calling me into. After seminary and interning with a large church, I knew that my calling was to evangelize. Evangelism, at that time, had a bad reputation in the public's and church's eyes, because of the scandals surrounding well-known television evangelists. I couldn't believe God was asking me to join that crowd.

But he wasn't. He was asking me to go out and preach His word to people who needed to hear it. That is evangelism. Television is but one channel where preaching God's word can take place. So if your definition of evangelism is limited to thinking only about the T.V. personalities, you need to wipe that clean from your mind.

Every one of God's children is called to evangelize. Very few do it. This study is a cumulation of my experiences over the past 20+ years as a full-time evangelist. My purpose is to help you, my brother or sister in Christ, learn that evangelizing is not something that is reserved for the guy on T.V., or for the street-corner preacher. Evangelism is a requirement of your faith. And it isn't mysterious, it doesn't take any special training, and it's not something to be afraid of.

I invite you to join me on a journey to a deeper understanding of what Jesus did for you, and show you how easy it is to share that good news with the world.