



SAFETY'S EDGE • Ron Hutchcraft

This is the most unreached generation in the history of America, yet the most reachable.

Last May, while visiting The Navigators ministry out in Colorado, I was told about a beautiful, cascading waterfall nearby. “It’s spectacular,” my friends said. “We just have to hike a little ways.” So we hiked. The path marched along a Rocky Mountain stream. I was visiting in May, when the snow had melted and the water was really high. It was beautiful, but eventually we walked right into a cliff wall.

“Guys, I thought we were going to a waterfall,” I said. “Where is it?” And they pointed across a fairly significant stream. “It’s over there.”

There was no bridge across this stream—just a pipeline, all wet from the spray underneath. “So how do we get to the waterfall?” I asked.

“You walk the pipeline.”

“Walk the pipeline?” I answered. “I don’t want to be a headline—Minister Swept Away in Rocky Mountain Stream, Found in Nebraska!”

Yet here I was, looking at this pipeline, psyched up about the beautiful view just out of sight. Standing on the edge of this stream, I realized that I had gone as far as I could go . . . safely. So has American Christianity.

We, as Christians, have gone as far as we can go safely. If we just keep doing what we’ve been doing, we will leave most of our generation unreached for Jesus Christ. Chuck Colson has said, “In a startlingly brief period, the West has been transformed from a Christian culture, in which the majority accepted basic Christian concepts, into a post-Christian culture.”

The Esther Crossroads

We are standing at what I call “the Esther crossroads.” In the Bible, we read about the king of Persia, who needed a new queen. He found Esther, a pretty Jewish girl he didn’t know was Jewish, and everything was going great. Then someone in the king’s court, a man named Haman, manipulated the king to sign a seemingly irrevocable decree to annihilate the Jewish nation—Esther’s people.

Mordecai, the cousin who raised Esther, sent her an urgent message, alerting her to the situation. But Esther knew that unless she had been summoned by the king, Persian law dictated that she be put to death. She was afraid to address him.

Which brings me to Esther 4:12-16: “When Esther’s words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: ‘Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?’



“Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ‘Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa [the capital city], and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish’” (New International Version).

A Life-or-Death Moment

Esther lived in a defining moment, a life-or-death moment. We, too, are living in urgent times. We live among the most unreached generation in American history. Almost half of Americans are unchurched. George Gallup Jr. recently told me that one-third of American teenagers don't know why there's an Easter. We are rapidly finding a generation who knows not our Book, knows of no right or wrong, and doesn't ever plan to go to a religious meeting to hear a religious speaker talk about a religious subject.

This is the most unreached generation in American history, yet the most reachable generation in American history. That's because the things that have made them lost have also made them ready for Jesus, and they have never been more ready. When we show up with the gospel, many of us are seeing unprecedented results.

But I have never known anyone to be rescued by a rescuer who chose comfort. Never has anybody been rescued by a fireman sitting in the fire station. Never has a lifeguard rescued anybody from the lifeguard's chair. You cannot rescue dying people and remain in a safe place, and make any kind of impact. If you don't believe me, just ask Jesus, who left the greatest comfort zone in the universe to go to a cross. And He said, “Follow Me.”

I believe that God is saying to you, “I've heard the cries of dying people across this country and around the world. I'm coming down to rescue them. And I'm sending you.” It's easier to not rescue dying people. But Jesus said He has come to seek and to save those who are lost.

A Ghostly Scene

When the Titanic went down with its 2,200 passengers, 1,500 people died. There were 20 lifeboats—only half enough—but even many of those were just half-full when launched. Hundreds of people actually got a life jacket that night and didn't go down with the ship. Three days later, when the funeral ships arrived from Nova Scotia, they came upon the ghostly scene of 328 people floating in life jackets, frozen to death.

Those people didn't die because the Titanic sank. They died because the people who were already saved wouldn't turn around their lifeboats to go back for them. I hope you will commit yourself to turning the lifeboats around for the rest of your life. May you never be content as long as there's one person still in the water.

However, you cannot, as Esther would tell you, rescue anyone from your comfort zone. When it's a matter of life or death, your efforts are focused. You drop everything. You fully mobilize. Personal safety doesn't matter.

People are dying. So ask yourself, “How can I accelerate the spread of the gospel through the tools that I have? What hard place is not being reached?” Will you move beyond a safe place to a dangerous place, where hope is rare, in order to become a beacon of hope?

Maybe you don't feel qualified. The people who feel the least qualified to do the rescuing are in the best position to do it. Just spend a week with some kids on a mission trip, and you will know what I mean. All of a sudden they start reading their Bibles. Kids who never listened before start asking questions. They start praying. What happened? For one week in their lives, they need their beliefs. God's people should be on a year-round mission trip in the place where we live. In the office. In school. On the campus. At the military base. At home.

Ask for a Verdict

As you communicate the gospel, remember to give people an opportunity to respond. Carol was a freshman in high school who attended my Campus Life club. I could see she was getting closer and closer to considering Christ.



One night, she stepped off a Ferris wheel and dropped dead of a cerebral hemorrhage. Carol was only 14, and I had never asked her if she wanted Jesus. There are too many people like that in our circles of influence. Don't just present the message. When it's life or death, you've got to ask for a verdict.

You are living at a defining moment. You've been given a decisive position. You've been trusted by your Savior with a desperate mission. Are you ready to step across a pipeline? Beyond what is geographically safe? Socially safe? Financially safe? Methodologically safe? Maybe God wants to move you somewhere. Are you ready to make that move beyond safety? God is summoning His people to be a part of some of the greatest things He has ever done. Quite simply, Jesus is asking us to do what He did. He wants you to lay down your life for the lost.

By the way, I did cross the pipeline on that hike. I lived to tell about it, and the view of that waterfall was awesome.

Maybe you're standing at the pipeline right now. You've gone as far as you can go . . . safely. Two thousand years ago, at a place called Golgotha, the Son of God crossed the pipeline. It's your turn now.

End

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