



YOU'RE NEXT

Outrageous stories from my life
that could change yours

GREG STIER



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.,
Carol Stream, Illinois

You're Next

Copyright © 2007 by Dare 2 Share Ministries, Inc.
All rights reserved. International copyright secured.

A Focus on the Family book published by
Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. Bold text in Scripture quotations were added by the author for emphasis.

In some instances names and certain details of stories have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior permission of Focus on the Family.

Editor: Marianne Hering
Cover design: Mark Lane
Cover and author photo: Wayne Armstrong

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Stier, Greg.

Dare 2 share : a field guide to sharing your faith with anyone, anytime, anywhere! / by Greg Stier.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-1-58997-370-4

ISBN-10: 1-58997-370-4

1. Evangelistic work. 2. Witness bearing (Christianity) 3. Apologetics. I. Title: Dare to share. II. Title.

BV3790.S84 2006

248'.5—dc22

2006004270

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 / 12 11 10 09 08 07

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Chapter 0	Outrageous Living (Why I'm Writing This Book)	1
Chapter 1	Death Encounter #1: War of the Womb	7
Chapter 2	Ma, the Bat, and the Purpose of Life	17
Chapter 3	Shattered Glass, Slit Wrists, and Sin	26
Chapter 4	Death Encounter #2: Poisoned	33
Chapter 5	Demon Dogs Are After Me	45
Chapter 6	Jack and Jesus	54
Chapter 7	Hell Made Me Pee My Pants	64
Chapter 8	Bob and God	75
Chapter 9	Let Jesus into Your What?	84
Chapter 10	Bullets, Bibles, and the 'Burbs	93
Chapter 11	Death Encounter #3: Butterscotch Candy ...	102
Chapter 12	Adam, Eve, and the Missing Link	111
Chapter 13	Who's Your Daddy?	118
Chapter 14	Yankee's Weird, Wild, and Wonderful Church	126
Chapter 15	\$50 Worth of Pennies Buys a Lot	135
Chapter 16	Report Cards on Judgment Day	147
Chapter 17	The Cloud that Haunts Me Still	155
Chapter 18	A Whole Lot of Shaking Going On	162
Chapter 19	The Phone Call from Hell	169
Chapter 20	Salvation and Seizures	179
Chapter 21	Me, Art, and Billy	187

Chapter 22	Mace in My Face	196
Chapter 23	Turnaround and Fadeaway	205
Chapter 24	“Heaven Is Nonsmoking, Ma!”	215
Chapter 25	Death Encounter #4: Massive Heart Attack . . .	224
Chapter 26	One Rogue Uncle	233
Chapter 27	Puppy Love, Broken Hearts, and the Trinity . . .	243
Chapter 28	Run! Run! Granny’s Got a Gun!	253
Chapter 29	“You Stinker!”	263
Chapter 30	Choose to Lose	272
The Big Q Chart		284
Notes		285

Outrageous Living (Why I'm Writing This Book)

As I type these words, I'm at the hospital. My mom is just a few feet away from me, hanging on to life by a thin thread, the same thin thread she has walked like a tightrope her entire life. This time the only net that will catch her is the loving embrace of Jesus. Her labored breathing is interrupted by the occasional horrible, hacking smoker's cough. The nurses tell me she is about to slip into a coma. Lung cancer will be the death of her . . . soon.

Ma is hard to describe. She is a strange combination of tough and tender, rage and compassion, strength and beauty. Many would say she is the nicest, most authentic person they ever met. Others are scared to death of her. If you are a good person, she will give you the shirt off her back. If you are mean, selfish, or condescending, you might want to duck.

For the last few weeks I've been sleeping in her hospital room on the hospice floor. Sleeping may be an overstatement. Between the nurses administering "pain-management" drugs and my mom's continual outbursts that range from confused—"Where am I?"—to delusional—"The lady is on fire, Greg! Put her out!"—to hopeful—

“I can’t wait to get to heaven!”—to sad—“Why won’t God just let me die?”—sleep is more of a hope than a reality.

Walking the hospital hallways is driving me crazy. Sitting here trying to have conversations with my near-comatose mom is breaking my heart. I have to write or I am going to burst. Reading or writing words has always been cathartic for me. The expression of emotions and ideas through sentences and paragraphs has brought me comfort ever since I was a child.

I’m writing this book in part to release my emotions as I tell you stories from life before I left my teenage years. These stories focus on the truths I learned from the weird and sometimes dangerous events that happened to me—events that transformed the way I thought about life and God. I believe these truths can change you as well by helping you grow deeper in your walk with God. As you understand more and more about who God is, you’ll be transformed by His power at work in you and through you. As God draws you into relationship with Him and changes you, He will use you to change your world.

Through this book, I hope that you will also see how God is at work in life’s everyday circumstances and how He is revealing Himself to you. No matter how tough or easy your life has been, you can see God is at work in your story—just as He was in mine—and He’s using your experiences to shape and mold you and draw you toward Himself.

As you read some of these outrageous stories from my life, you’ll see that I don’t come from a churchgoing, pew-sitting, hymn-singing family. I come from a family filled with bodybuilders, brawlers, and storytellers. In many ways my family members are more like a tribal people from some distant continent who lived to do battle during the day and show battle scars around the campfire at night.

The stories that you are about to read in this book, as best as I

can determine, are true. Most of these stories I was directly involved in; the other ones, which are usually about a family member or took place when I was too young to remember, have been confirmed and reconfirmed by family members and with outside witnesses.

Everyone who told me about Ma (not Mom or Mother but “Ma”) swore the stories were true. I heard them from too many people to doubt they happened. Once when my mom was a teenager, some girl gang member pulled a knife on her in a movie theater. Ma threw her over the balcony. When she was in high school she was a member of a girl’s gang called “The Curls.” She kept a straight razor hidden in her hair and wasn’t afraid to use it. She would fight guys two at a time without thinking or blinking. The stories of her violent outbursts go on and on and on. Some are too gruesome to put in this book.

I witnessed a few of her outbursts. Something in her past had hurt her deeply, and her rage was always lurking in the shadows like a wounded grizzly ready to attack. Some soul trigger hidden deep inside her heart would be squeezed, and she would morph before our very eyes into a tornado of fury. This volcanic rage would usually end up badly for the offending person. But I know that her flailing fists were taking swings at the pain in her soul more than the person in front of her.

And now she is lying in a hospital bed at my side, on the brink of death. My once strong mom is a shadow of the person she was just a few years ago. It is breaking my heart.

When my mom was more alert a few weeks ago, we walked down memory lane for hours, for days. We talked about life growing up in inner-city Denver. We talked about the fights we witnessed over the years. We talked about how Jesus changed everything.

She loved that I was using the story of our family to communicate biblical truth to teenagers. She loved the fact that, by God’s

grace, I was rescued from the path she had taken as a young person. She was proud that I was a preacher and that I was working to equip teenagers to know, live, and share their faith in Jesus. The last time Ma came to a Dare 2 Share conference I led, she stood in the back of an arena full of thousands of teens and beamed with excitement because teenagers were being called to choose the narrow path that leads to eternal life rather than the highway to destruction that she had picked as a teenager.

Why am I writing this book? Because I've seen what the power of Jesus can do in transforming a life and an entire family. Because I long to see an army of Jesus-loving teens rise up and transform this planet for God. Because Ma wanted me to.

As I sit watching my mom die, I am reminded of the wild life she had on this side of eternity, the same kind of craziness that most of my entire family has experienced on some level. I am reminded of how God used the insane things that happened to me to turn me into a "Jesus freak" before my 18th birthday. My prayer is that God will use this book, the stories in it, and especially the truths in it to turn you into a Jesus-loving superfanatic, too.

I hope you'll be next.

P.S. Ma died at 7:25 A.M. What an outrageous life she lived.

The Story Behind the Stories

Each chapter in *You're Next* tells one story from my life. Some of these stories are pretty intense. I come from a very violent background. Some of these stories are funny. But all of these true stories taught me a lesson about the Christianity that I now fully embrace.

So here's how it goes. I did my best to make these stories chrono-

logical, so this book starts with my early life and finishes with my senior year of high school. Each chapter seeks to answer a question about Christianity, which I call **The Big Q**. After addressing The Big Q, each chapter will ask the question **So What?** In this section I will help you think through why this particular truth of Christianity is important and what difference it should make in your life.

My goal is that by the time you finish reading *You're Next* you will have mastered the answers to each question and will have applied these answers to your life in a personal way, a way that makes a difference in the way you live. And as you understand more about God and are drawn into a deeper relationship with Him, God will use you to impact the world around you for Him. You too will find you're ready to live for God!

In addition to The Big Q and So What? I have added four other features to each chapter:

- **Blast from the Past:** A quote or creed from the past that explains the answer to The Big Q in a brief and biblical way
- **Go Figure!** A Bible passage that deals with The Big Q and a list of questions that will help you understand and apply those verses to your life in practical and powerful ways
- **Insane Brain Strain:** A hard aspect to accept about the truth, it is designed to provoke your mind a bit and get the neurons firing
- **You're Next!** A kind of journal-meets-action-plan section for your thoughts, prayers, and feelings as you choose to make changes in your life based on that chapter's truth



Cute as a baby . . . but I grew out of it!

Death Encounter # 1: War of the Womb

We never talked about it. Not once in 38 years. But I knew. She had a secret, and she didn't want me to find out about it. It hung over my mom like a dark cloud. What was it? I'll tell you in a bit. But before I do, there is something you need to know.

I love my mom, and she loved my brother, Doug, and me with all of her heart. She raised us the best she knew how, but she worried. Almost every night she wept and begged us not to turn out like her.

As I grew from a child to a teenager, confusion and questions filled my heart and my head. But there was one thing I was never confused about, one truth that I never questioned: My mom loved me.

So I couldn't understand the cloud over Ma. I didn't know what caused the darkness until one day, out of the blue, my grandma told me. What was this dark secret that mom had worked so hard to keep? That she had come dangerously close to having an abortion, that she had almost killed me.

Now, some who knew my mom are probably shocked by this, and some may deny it. But I know that what my grandmother told me that fateful day was completely true. Although it was painful to hear, it actually helped me understand why my mom felt so guilty all the time. It helped me understand why for so long she had been

resistant to put her faith in Jesus. She thought she was too sinful to save.

Though we never spoke of it, I can speculate at her possible motives for considering an abortion. At the time I guess Ma didn't think that Grandma and Grandpa, her strict Baptist parents, would understand that their black sheep daughter had gotten pregnant, this time out of wedlock. I'm sure she was terrified they would find out that their rebellious daughter had messed up and threatened to break their hearts again. Ma couldn't stomach the thought of seeing another look of disappointment in her parents' eyes.

Besides, she already had a son from one of her past marriages. He was the single bright spot in her life, even though little Doug had his set of unique challenges. Not only did he have epilepsy and some learning disabilities, but there were other problems. Being raised by a single mom on a single income without government assistance in one of the highest crime-rate areas in inner-city Denver, Doug had the odds stacked against him. The last thing Ma needed was another kid. She didn't want to bring another child into her world, a world of pain, a world of violence, a world of guilt.

Additionally, the guy who was the "father" wasn't going to take any financial responsibility. As soon as he found out Ma was pregnant he moved two thousand miles away . . . literally. So why not abort? Maybe she could abort a little of her shame in the process.

There was only one problem for her: It was 1965, and abortion was still illegal in the United States. This meant that she had to find somebody, somewhere, who would do an illegal abortion. So, under the pretense of visiting relatives, she drove east toward Boston, where she planned to rid herself of the shame she felt in her womb and her soul. God's grace, second thoughts, and a phone call from her parents (who found out what she was up to) rescued me from a shady surgeon's instruments of death.

Even though she chose the right path, the guilt still haunted her. Every time she looked at me, she was reminded that she had almost ended my life. Throughout my elementary and junior high school years I didn't understand this bittersweet look in Ma's eyes. But Grandma's inside information, as painful as it was, helped me understand the unrelenting guilt in my mother's soul. It also helped me understand the pent-up anger that was always ready to explode from within her.

I had always had a lot of confusion about the whole dad thing. I thought that my brother and I had the same father. But Doug's dad never wanted to talk to me. If I answered the phone when he called, he would just say, "Put your brother on the line." I thought he just hated me.

But he wasn't my dad; he was Doug's. I was somewhere around 12 years old when I found out that my real dad had left town before I was ever born. This news rocked my world. It shocked me, a vulnerable seventh-grader struggling with self-identity.

So what got me through? The answer is simple: God.

In one of her more lucid moments as my mom lay waiting to die, we were talking about my childhood and our struggles in the tough part of town. Then she asked me a question I'll never forget. "Do you remember what you used to say to kids who made fun of you for not having a dad?"

"No, Ma," I said. "I don't remember."

"You used to say, 'God's my Daddy.' "

When it comes to the question of who God is and what He is like, you need to understand I take this question personally. To me, God is the only Father I've ever had. He is my role model, mentor, and hero. He is my Daddy.

If you have put your faith and trust in Jesus as your only hope of going to heaven, then God is your Daddy, too. Jesus said, "I am the way

and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him” (John 14:6-7).

Although I don't know a lot about my earthly father, I know a lot about my heavenly one. From the time I was little I've scoured His love letters to me—the Bible. I've poured out my heart to Him through prayer. I've thought about Him in the daytime and dreamed of Him at night. He has been the anchor for my soul, my comforter in painful times, my closest friend and confidant, my loving master, my loving God, my gracious Savior.

Do you know Him? Do you know what He is like?



The Big Q: Who is God, and what is He like?

Since the beginning of humankind, people have attempted to answer this question, many to no avail.

How do we define the indefinable? How do we use our limited minds to describe a limitless subject? We don't. We let the indefinable and indescribable define and describe Himself.

So where does God define and describe Himself? In the second book of the Bible:

Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ”

God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac

and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.” (Exodus 3:13-15)

In this passage, God is trying to talk Moses into confronting Pharaoh and rescuing the Israelites from the tyranny of the Egyptians. Moses is freaking—and not in the positive “Jesus freak” sense. The real truth is that Moses is afraid. He does not want to be the deliverer of the Israelites.

Right in the middle of his laundry list of excuses he basically asks God, “Hey, what do I say if they want to know your name?”

God’s answer is direct and powerful: “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ”

Now this may seem like a weird thing to say. Why would anybody have the name “I AM,” especially God?

One reason was to emphasize to Moses and the Israelites (and to us) that there was only one true God. In a culture where many gods were worshiped, God was teaching Moses the reality that there is only one true God.

The truth that there is only one God isn’t the truth that blew me away when I was a child. The truth that rattled my cage and transformed my thinking was the reality that God *is*. Before I was born, God *is*. Although I was confused about who I was, God has never been perplexed about who He is.

He is the eternally self-existent one. What does that mean? It means that He doesn’t need food, air, shelter, or companionship. He exists with or without us. He has always been and will always be here. Before you or I were ever born, He is.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.¹

—NICENE CREED, 4TH CENTURY

Let's take a look at what God is:

He is there. Smart guys (aka *theologians*) call this omnipresence. Simply put this means that God is everywhere all the time. He is ever-present. King David put it this way:

Where can I go from your Spirit?
 Where can I flee from your presence?
 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
 if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
 if I settle on the far side of the sea,
 even there your hand will guide me,
 your right hand will hold me fast. (Psalm 139:7-10)

To put it straight up, you can't get away from God. You can run, but you can't hide. But it also means (and this is the part that helped me turn into a fanatic for Jesus) that He is always there to hold me up when I feel like giving up. While my earthly dad was gone before I was born, my heavenly Dad would never let me out of His sight. Why? Because He is there.

Not only is He there, . . .

He is holy. The word *holy* means that He is set apart, pure, totally unique, and different. God is so pure that He will blow your mind. He is set apart from sin and set apart to perfection, to righteousness (think of rightness on steroids), to sheer purity.

Have you ever seen a label on a bottle, can, or container that read, "100 percent pure"? Well, it's a lie. I guarantee that if you look closely enough, you'll find some microbes or molecules that shouldn't be in it.

The only thing in this universe that you could truly put the 100

percent pure label on is God Himself. He is 100 percent pure, without any sin or imperfection.

What significance does this have for you as a young person? The same it had for me. If God is holy, we should aspire to be holy too, seeing as how this holy God is our Daddy. Maybe that's why He tells us in 1 Peter 1:14-16, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: '**Be holy, because I am holy.**' "

Go Figure!



Open your Bible, ask God for help to understand, and read Romans 8:12-17. Answer these questions:

1. What does it look like when we live according to the "sinful nature"?

2. What are some ways we can "put to death the misdeeds of the body"?

3. How does it feel to be one of "God's children"?

4. The word *Abba* used in this passage means "Daddy." Do you consider God your "Daddy"? Why or why not?

5. How does this passage show that God is both holy and our Father?



We are called to be holy as He is holy! That has myspace.com, movie, dating, masturbation, Internet, and music-choice implications!

So why try? Because He is!

He is there. He is watching. He is holy.

But He is so much more!

- **He is all-powerful!** "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14)
- **He is all-knowing!** "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Romans 11:33)
- **He is all-loving!** "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 John 4:7-8)
- **He is eternal!** " 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.' " (Revelation 1:8)

The list goes on and on and on. Suffice it to say that God is bigger, more awesome, more amazing, and more shocking than any puny thing you or I have ever seen on this planet.

He is bigger than we are. He is the Creator of all that we will ever see (Genesis 1:1). He holds everything together by His power (Colossians 1:17). He is the supreme ruler of the universe (Revelation 19), yet He loves us enough to die for us (John 3:16).



INSANE BRAIN STRAIN

God has no beginning. How can that be? If He is, then not only will He always be here, but He has always been here. Some have described His existence as a ring, no beginning and no end, just a continuous circle of existence. But even with this illustration to help, the concept still blows my mind. Does it blow yours?

So What?

The fact that there is an all-powerful God who is perfect and in complete control of the universe changes everything! Think about it—you can relax in His guidance, and you can know that even when things don't seem to make sense, God will work it all out in the end. The coolest thing is that no matter what kind of relationship you have with your earthly father, you will always have a perfect and powerful heavenly Father who will never let you down. And because God is holy, this should motivate you to be like your Daddy and live a life pleasing to Him!

Weird, wild, and a reason to worship.

He is, when we are not, when our dads are not, when life is not.

It's enough to turn you into a Jesus freak. Ma would have been proud.

YOU'RE NEXT!

God is my Daddy! He is your Daddy too! And He is! He is there. He is holy. He is loving, eternal, merciful, and more! Let "I am" know what you are most thankful about when it comes to who He is! I already told you mine. You're next!

Dear God,



For more info on **The Big Q: Who is God, and what is He like?** visit www.dare2share.org/soulfuel/archives and check out *Soul Fuel* question #1.

The Big Q Chart

Each of the 30 chapters in this book deals with a key question and core truth of Christianity. You can explore these core truths further by signing up to receive *Soul Fuel*, a free weekly e-mail blast. Every week *Soul Fuel* specifically addresses one of these 30 key questions. Free weekly *Soul Fuel* Youth Leader Guides and Parent/Teen Discussion Guides are also available. To sign up for *Soul Fuel* or to access it online, at www.dare2share.org/soulfuel.

Dare 2 Share youth conferences, held in numerous cities across the nation, equip and motivate thousands of teens each year to know, live, share, and own their faith in Jesus. Each year's conference tour is designed around a specific selection of the 30 questions, with all 30 questions addressed in the course of a five-year conference cycle. For more information on a Dare 2 Share conference near you, visit www.dare2share.org/conference.

The 30 Big Q's

- Chapter 1 Who is God, and what is He like?
- Chapter 2 Who am I, where did I come from, and what is my purpose?
- Chapter 3 What is sin, and how does it impact my life and my relationship with others?
- Chapter 4 Why does God allow evil in this world?
- Chapter 5 Who are Satan and his demons?
- Chapter 6 Who is Jesus?
- Chapter 7 Is there a real heaven and hell, and what are they like?

- Chapter 8 How do I know Jesus really rose from the dead?
- Chapter 9 What is a Christian, and how does a person become one?
- Chapter 10 Is the Bible really God's Word, and does it really relate to my life?
- Chapter 11 What is prayer, and how do I do it?
- Chapter 12 Did God create everything, and why does it matter?
- Chapter 13 Will God ever leave or forsake me?
- Chapter 14 What is the church, and why should I be involved?
- Chapter 15 Why should I study the Bible, and how do I do it?
- Chapter 16 Is there a judgment day, and what difference should it make in my life?
- Chapter 17 How should the return of Christ impact my life?
- Chapter 18 What are spiritual gifts, and how do I discover mine?
- Chapter 19 How do I engage in spiritual warfare?
- Chapter 20 What is the Great Commission, and how does it relate to me?
- Chapter 21 What about people who have never heard the gospel?
- Chapter 22 What is truth, and can I know it with certainty?
- Chapter 23 Who is the Holy Spirit, and what does He do?
- Chapter 24 Can I really be forgiven for all my sins, even the really bad ones?
- Chapter 25 Why did Jesus die on the cross?
- Chapter 26 If Jesus is the only way to heaven, are all other religions wrong?
- Chapter 27 What is the Trinity?
- Chapter 28 How do I defend my faith?
- Chapter 29 How do I get plugged in to the power of the Holy Spirit?
- Chapter 30 How can I really worship God in everything I do?

Notes

Chapter 1

1. *Creeds of Christendom*, “The Nicene Creed,” <http://www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm>.

Chapter 2

1. CRTA, “Historic Church Documents,” Westminster Shorter Catechism, <http://www.reformed.org/documents/wsc/index.html>.

Chapter 3

1. Think Exist, “Thinkexist.com,” *John Calvin Quotes*, http://thinkexist.com/quotation/though_satan_instills_his_poison-and_fans_the/170620.html.

Chapter 4

1. OrthodoxyToday.org, John Kapsalis, “When Bad Things Aren’t Supposed to Happen,” <http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles6/KapsalisHope.php>.

Chapter 5

1. The Gospel Truth, GospelTruth.net, People God Has Used, William Booth and Catherine Booth, Written Works, Catherine Booth, *Life and Death*, “Religious Indifference,” http://www.gospeltruth.net/booth/cath_booth/life_and_death/cbooth_1_indifference.htm.

Chapter 6

1. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), page 56.