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THE HERALD

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Walking Past the Dead

By Whitney White

It was an ordinary day.

I buckled my infant into his stroller and we headed out for our routine two mile walk on our uneventful, quiet country road lined with trees. We passed our two neighbors' houses and then walked by the pasture full of cows. As the warm sun shone on my little boy, he closed his eyes and soon fell asleep. I listened to praise and worship music as I thought about the pile of clothes I had to iron for church the next day, the lunch I had to prepare when I got back, and the fun night with our four boys that lie ahead of us.

I made the gentle right turn onto the gravel road that loops around a beautiful wooden chapel that was built in the 1800s. It's a peaceful scene we pass every day and take for granted. Behind the chapel is a large cemetery that spreads out across rolling green hills. I mechanically walked to-

ward the chapel nonchalantly with a thousand thoughts bouncing across my mind, while my little one continued to sleep.

Suddenly, I noticed an unfamiliar truck parked behind the old chapel. The driver's door was open, but there was not a person in sight. It wasn't unusual to see vehicles at the cemetery occasionally, but someone familiar placing flowers was always nearby.

My eyes slowly scanned the parking lot then the entire cemetery from right to left. I noticed the gate was wide open and knew immediately that was out of the ordinary. Most of the regulars shut the gate behind them to keep stray dogs out. I turned my music off to listen for voices.

Silence.

A strange feeling swept over me. I knew I couldn't be alone because the truck looked as if someone would come jump back in and drive away any minute. The only thing I could reason was that a grieving loved one must be kneeling beside one of the tombstones. If that were the case, I didn't want them to think I was being intrusive, so I began to push the stroller again. However, my eyes still searched around the tombstones for some kind of movement.

“What if something terrible happened? What if someone was kidnapped? What if someone is dead in the cemetery?” As unsettled as I felt, the thought sounded so ridiculous that I shook my head, turned my music back on, and continued my walk. Those type of things just didn’t happen in our little community.

I looked back once more to be sure I couldn’t see anyone. I still had a nagging feeling that I should go back and step in the gate to be certain no one needed my help, but in the event someone was there grieving I didn’t want them to think I was being rude or nosey. Since I felt uneasy, I planned to get my husband to drive back with me as soon as I got home so that he could look around and make sure everything was alright.

As I made it back to my driveway, I could see my older boys and my husband working hard on a project. I hated to disturb them and since the baby was in such a deep sleep, I decided to walk a few more miles.

By the time I got back home, my walking buddy was awake and hungry. Just as I made him a bottle and sat down to feed him, my husband and boys came rushing inside to get their showers and eat lunch. It wouldn’t be long until our night of fun began. My husband’s phone rang and above the noise of the boys running wild with excitement I heard him say, “You are kidding me! That’s terrible.”

Immediately, I remembered the myste-

rious truck at the cemetery and how I had failed to come straight home and get my husband to ride back over with me to check things out.

“You won’t believe this,” my husband said as he ended the call with his father, “they just found an older man dead in the cemetery! He was lying right inside the gate.”

I was overwhelmed with guilt and disbelief that there really had been someone there. How could I have been so selfish? Why didn’t I go in the gate and check? Could I have helped him – possibly saved his life by calling 911? Did he see me standing there and worse, did he see me walk away?

Throughout our fun night of browsing through the bookstore, going out to eat, and then taking the boys to the arcade, I felt like I was in a fog. I desperately wished I could wind the clock back. Why? I kept wondering, why didn’t I take the time to walk through the gate and check? Why had I let fear stop me?

For days, I beat myself up over this. I even walked back to the cemetery to see just how close I was to the dying man. I had literally been feet away. A friend of mine, who is a paramedic, told me not to worry. She explained that he had a massive heart attack and there was nothing I could have possibly done. But still...I grieved for this stranger that I walked right past.

One morning as I was praying for his family and still questioning why I hadn’t

stopped, I felt as if the Lord impressed upon my heart, “Why does this situation bother you? You walk past the dead every day.”

Immediately, I felt as if the fog had been lifted and my eyes had been opened in the most convicting way. It was true! Every single day, I do walk past people who are dying in their sins. I come in contact with these lost people in my extended family, my circle of friends, in my mundane everyday business, and even visitors in my own home. Some I know very well and it is obvious they are rapidly declining and becoming casualties of sin because of their own selfish, calloused heart. Some are strangers, but I can easily tell they are on the wrong path desperately searching for a Savior in all the wrong places. Often times, I realize these people need my help, but for fear of offending them, I keep quiet. I don't want them to think I'm rude...or intrusive so I keep walking. Even worse, I know they are hell-bound, but my schedule is too busy for me to stop and warn them of the danger ahead.

I will always wonder if I could have helped that man or maybe just held his hand so he wouldn't have had to be alone, but I am thankful for the lesson I learned that day and the impression he had on me. He had plans for lunch just like I did and I'm sure he had plans for that evening, too. However, he had no idea that when he went to thoughtfully place flowers at his parent's grave that he

would breathe his last breath on this earth.

During this Christmas season, we will come face to face with many who are but a breath away from death and an eternity in hell. We will visit or care for those in hospitals fighting for their lives. We will “like” countless selfies on social media posted by our lost “friends” who seem happy, healthy, and whole. We will brush past the dying as we frantically buy pointless Christmas gifts that have no eternal value. We will give those meaningless gifts to loved ones who are sinking in sin as we turn a blind eye. Sadly, we will even sit through services at church and hear the Christmas story with people who are great pretenders but don't actually have a sincere relationship with a Savior, which is Christ the Lord who was born specifically to bring hope to a lost and dying world.

Will you lay down your pride and give them the very best gift of all? Will you face the fear of rejection to give them Jesus? Will you slow down and take the time to give them the perfect gift that will fill all of their voids?

Don't waste another minute. Don't walk past the dead, because you just might walk away and never get the opportunity to help them again. Share Jesus boldly.

Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow. - Psalm 144:4

FUNNIES

“I sold my house this week,” reports comedian Garry Shandling. “I got a pretty good price for it, but it made my landlord mad.”

“I’m afraid you’re going to have to give up every form of dessert,” the doctor told Mrs. Sterling. “You’re simply overweight, and that’s the best advice I can give you.”

Mrs. Sterling considered a moment. “And what’s your second best advice?”

On their anniversary night, the husband sat his wife down in the den with her favorite magazine, turned on the soft reading lamp, slipped off her shoes, patted and propped up her feet and announced he was preparing dinner all by himself. “How romantic,” she thought.

Two-and-a-half hours later she was still waiting for dinner to be served. She tip-toed to the kitchen and found it a colossal mess.

“Almost ready!” he said. “Sorry it took me so long—I had to refill the pepper shaker.”

“Why, Honey, how long could that have taken you?”

“More’n an hour, I reckon. Wasn’t easy stuffin’ it through those dumb little holes.”

A fourth grader decided to do a project on the harmful effects of alcohol for the science fair at his elementary school. His mother, who had never had a sip of booze in her life, nervously went to a local liquor store to purchase the needed supplies. “Give me the cheapest, hardest vodka you have,” she said to the counter clerk.”

“Is this for you, ma’am?” asked the employee. “If so, I might recommend something that’s only a little more expensive but much smoother.”

“No, that’s okay,” the mother stammered without thinking. “It’s for my nine-year-old son.”

Hats were advertised at the department store at \$10 each or two for \$15. A man approached the counter with two in his hands.

“Now if I just buy this one, how much will it cost me?”

“That one by itself will cost \$10, as marked,” the clerk determined.

“And if I buy both?”

“You can have them both for \$15 total.”

“Well, I’ll just take the \$5 one.”