

"Cast Member Church is one of my favorite Kingdom stories in our time. It is a case study in innovation and focus. Steven's voice is as simple as it is stirring. In all, this book is a masterpiece of contextualization driven by love."

- Brian Sanders, Founder of The Underground Network and author of "Underground Church" and "Microchurches."

SAMPLE

KINGDOM INFLUENCE

Three Proven Keys to Revealing Jesus in a Skeptical and Suspicious World.

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Kingdom Influence: Three Proven Keys to Revealing Jesus in a Skeptical and Suspicious World. Copyright © 2022 by Steven Barr.

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Introduction: Lost (A Parable)

Up and down Main Street, all eyes in the crowd focused on the approaching parade. Hundreds of people crowded the curbs on each side of the street, trying to squeeze into the best spot for viewing. Those in the front of the crowd sat down on the curbs. They had been there for at least an hour to ensure they had the perfect vantage point. Some were eating handful after handful of popcorn. Others were licking their ice cream cones as quickly as possible, trying to race the ravages of the Florida sun on their frozen concoctions.

It's hard to describe the atmosphere of Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in moments like these. One thing for sure is that it is always festive. People from all over the world sit or stand side-by-side to take in one of the most famous events that make Walt Disney World famous for creating magic: Every day, just before 3:00 pm, the crowd's energy rises with the anticipation of the spectacle, soon to roll down the street.

The 3:00 parade.

Charging the atmosphere with excitement was the knowledge that the crowd would soon see every Disney character imaginable passing before their eyes.

With the attention focused up and down the street, no one noticed the growing distress of a little girl behind them.

She sat on the stoop of a doorway, dressed in white denim shorts and a black t-shirt with a picture of Belle from Beauty and the Beast dancing across the front. A band-aid on her right knee had long outlived the scrape it had once protected.

She was no more than six years old. Her long, curly auburn hair was pulled back in a ponytail. Her hair flipped from one side to the other as she repeatedly looked up and down the sidewalk. She scanned to the left and then to the right, to the left, and the right again. Her face was red. Her eyes seemed hollow, void of any excitement that was around her. She searched every face that passed in front of her. She was losing hope that one would look familiar.

It's terrifying for a child to realize that they are lost, especially in a place like Magic Kingdom. Surrounded by smiles, giggles, and squeals—being separated from loved ones is the last thing a little one would ever imagine happening in the most magical place on earth.

The volume of the music increased, announcing the parade was about to turn the corner. The crowd leaned into the street to see the approaching spectacle. Ooos and ahhs filled the air. Parents hoisted children to their shoulders. Stragglers arriving late to the parade route scrambled and squeezed into the slightest sliver of an opening to snag a photo or two.

Dancers in bright and colorful costumes moved in sync with the music, signaling the celebration's

beginning. They smiled at the waving crowds of guests from both sides of the street. Sparkling floats rolled by, elevating Disney characters and performers high above the masses. There were shouts from children and adults alike. Hundreds of phones captured momentary memories as each float slowly made its way down Main Street.

For the little girl, the crowd's cheers only made her feel more isolated. She had never felt so alone. As far as she knew, her world was collapsing, and no one could help her. She trembled on the inside, and panic quickly erupted to the surface. She wanted to scream but couldn't find the strength. Helpless and hopeless, she pulled her knees up to her chin, crossed her arms, and buried her face.

As far as she knew, she was invisible. She had no idea how to communicate her desperation. She rocked back and forth, sobbing into her knees.

A few steps away, a young woman with long dark hair and glasses looked in the girl's direction. Her name tag, plaid skirt, and ruffled sleeves—reminiscent of the 1800s—gave her away as a Disney Cast Member. Seeing the girl, she knew there was something wrong. Without hesitation, yet with wise caution, she walked in her direction.

"Hello, Princess," she said as she sat down on the stoop beside the softly weeping child.

She folded her hands in her lap and leaned forward, head tilting in the youngster's direction. The little girl looked up, eyes red and swollen from tears. Strands of hair were matted against her wet cheeks. She looked at the Cast Member but couldn't manage a single word.

The Cast Member spoke with a gentleness and understanding that only comes from having encountered circumstances like this one. It only took her a moment to assess the situation and determine how to bring it to a resolution. But this all had to be done without alarming a very panicked little girl. The Cast Member pointed to her name tag and drew an imaginary line under her name.

"My name is Simona. What's yours?"

There was a long pause as if the little girl was deciding if this was a person she could trust. But she didn't feel like she had much choice. She wasn't sure her parents would approve of her talking to a stranger, no matter how nice she seemed. She took in a quick breath and exhaled.

"Moriah," she answered hesitantly.

"That's a beautiful name," said Simona. Moriah looked up, but she could barely manage a smile. She continued to scan the crowd, eyes darting back and forth, from one direction to the other.

Simona noticed Moriah's T-shirt.

"Is Belle your favorite princess?"

The little girl stopped her search and blankly stared ahead. She nodded ever so slightly.

"Belle is my favorite princess too. Do you know why?"

"Why?" Moriah whispered.

"Because she's very smart and very brave."

Something in Simona's words caused the little girl's breathing to quicken, her eyes to well up, and her lips to tremble. Her desperation became more than she could contain. The dam broke, and her tears came pouring down.

"I can't find my mommy and daddy!"

Simona's eyes quickly scanned the crowd, hoping to recognize a desperate mother or father looking to reunite with their child. She couldn't see anyone who fit that description. After all, it wasn't easy since all she could see were the tall backs of those in the crowd watching the parade.

As Moriah sobbed, she surrendered her hesitation and leaned into Simona. The young Cast Member put her arm around her and leaned her head against Moriah's.

Another Cast Member approached the two sitting on the stoop. He wore a plaid vest that matched the pattern of Simona's dress. His name tag read, "Daniel." As Moriah's tears continued to fall, Simona turned her head toward Daniel. She quietly spoke a few details about the little girl. As quickly as he had appeared, he disappeared.

Moriah wiped her face on the sleeve of her T-shirt, most likely in preparation for another wave of tears. Her little body breathed quick yet exhausted breaths as she continued to look up and down the sidewalk for any sign of her parents.

Simona gave a reassuring smile to Moriah.

"I remember one time when I was your age. I was in a big market, and I couldn't find my mommy and daddy either."

Moriah looked up and began to relax. She took a couple of big sniffs.

"Do you know what?" asked Simona.

"What?" Moriah replied with red, but questioning eyes.

"They had been looking for me the whole time. In just a few minutes, they found me!"

"Were you scared?" asked Moriah, a little more composed.

"I was...," she admitted *"...but not for very long."*

Moriah looked down at her shoes.

"Why not?"

"Because I knew my mommy and daddy were coming to get me—just like your mommy and daddy are coming to get you right now. And knowing that made me feel brave."

Moriah managed half a smile.

Daniel appeared again and gave Simona a wink of assurance, letting her know Disney Security was aware of the situation. He also handed her a tissue. Simona helped Moriah dry her eyes and held the tissue as she blew her nose.

Simona looked around at the crowd. It wouldn't be long before the parade would conclude, and the park guests would be dispersing.

"Moriah, I'm going to sit right here and stay with you until your mommy and daddy are here. Is that okay with you?"

"Uh-huh," she said, leaning into Simona's cradling arm.

Moriah was physically and emotionally exhausted. She took a deep breath and let out an equally deep sigh. Together, she and Simona watched the crowd. They talked for the next few minutes about anything and nothing. Now and then, Simona would remind Moriah that her parents were not far away.

Before long, a desperate but relieved voice approached from further down the sidewalk.

"Moriah, sweetie!"

"Mommyyyyyyy," came the little girl's explosively joyful response as she stood up and ran towards her approaching parents.

She flung herself into her mother's arms. Her dad followed close behind. This time the tears were happy ones. The family clung to each other as if they would never let go.

Both parents spoke with Daniel and a second Disney security officer. The officer confirmed another happy ending into his two-way radio. Hand in hand with her parents, Moriah led them up to Simona.

"This is my friend," she said with a tired smile.

She paused and looked up at Simona and then turned toward her parents.

"She said I was brave."

Moriah's parents thanked Simona repeatedly. Moriah reached out to wrap her arms around Simona's waist, but Simona crouched down to receive a proper hug. She closed her eyes and smiled as Moriah squeezed with all her might.

Simona looked into Moriah's face. She brushed a couple of stray strands of hair out of the happy girl's eyes. She put her forehead against Moriah's.

"You are braver than you think you are, Princess," she whispered.

Though her face was still wet and swollen from tears, Moriah's smile extended from ear to ear as the reunited family began to walk off hand in hand. Moriah glanced back, catching a glimpse of Simona waving and wiping her cheek.

The crowd continued to watch the parade until its conclusion. The final float carried a waving Mickey and Minnie Mouse, which marked the end of the extravaganza. As the music faded, the thousands of spectators began moving back toward the various areas of Magic Kingdom. They were off to the next attraction on their agenda. They were utterly unaware of what had transpired on the doorway stoop.

Little did the crowd know that while they were caught up in the euphoria of the passing parade, Jesus had been sitting right behind them, drying the eyes of a lost and lonely little girl.