



THE
TRUTH
THAT
TRANSFORMED
ME

THE LIFE OF D. JAMES KENNEDY





'Turn on the television almost anywhere in America and in many places all over the world and there he is, Dr. D. James Kennedy. Open a magazine and there is an article by Dr. Kennedy. Visit on the right day in the nation's Capitol and he is there. In thousands of churches Evangelism Explosion, his unique approach to gospel witness, is currently or has been in the recent past employed. Who is this remarkable man? For the benefit of those who do not know him well, *The Truth that Transformed Me: The Life of D. James Kennedy*, is the remarkable account of one of the most beloved preachers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. This biography will both challenge the reader and inspire him in his own devotional walk with Christ.'

Paige Patterson, President,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas

'It is an unassailable fact that Dr. D. James Kennedy through the ministry of Evangelism Explosion has done as much or more than any individual in the last 40 to 50 years to, not only promote evangelism but, provide an avenue to train every day Christians to participate in the joy of leading men and women to Christ. From the first time I read his quote, "Evangelism is more caught than taught" it has encouraged and stimulated, not only me but, countless thousands around the world. Men of God whom the Lord uses can seem distant however this book allows you, in an inviting way, to meet and get to know "Jimmy" Kennedy. Read it...You are about to get a new best friend.'

Harry L. Reeder, Senior Pastor
Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Alabama

'More than anybody I know, Dr. D. James Kennedy epitomizes evangelism and the sovereignty of God in his ministry. His influence on me has been profound. This well-written biography provides a history, wonderful anecdotes and insights into one of America's most powerful Christian leaders of our generation.'

R T Kendall





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CHRISTIAN FOCUS





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1

WHY AM I HERE?

At 3:15 p.m. Jimmy Kennedy sprinted down the sidewalk. He inhaled deeply as if he had held his breath all day unwilling to taint his lungs with schoolroom air. Eight in the morning to three in the afternoon is an eternity for any thirteen-year-old and Jimmy looked forward to the comfort of home.

The heavy door of his apartment building slammed behind him as he ran toward the staircase. Just as he began to climb, a loud *whump* shook the building causing the overhead light to dance on its long chain. The light made weird shadows as it slowly swung back and forth. Jimmy froze and listened. He cocked his head in an effort to hear any other telling sound. He strained to see past the landing above him. No one had bothered to replace the burned out light in the second floor hallway. The bulb dangling in the entrance lacked the wattage to penetrate the shroud of darkness beyond it.

The hairs on the back of Jimmy's neck prickled with a faint flicker of alarm. He shook his head to clear his mind from the thoughts his imagination conjured. 'It couldn't have come from





THE TRUTH THAT TRANSFORMED ME

our place,' he whispered to calm his nerves. 'The thump was too loud to come from there.'

His mouth felt dry, and he swallowed hard and ran the back of his hand across his lips. The door of his apartment loomed near the top of the dark staircase, and suddenly he was afraid to enter. He approached his door on tiptoe and pressed his ear against it. Closing his eyes to shut out all distractions, he listened.

Within moments a crash of splintering glass caused him to jump back in alarm. Mumbled cursing followed the noise. He pressed his back against the wall and glanced up and down the hall to see if anyone else had heard the sound.

No one appeared. He was alone. His pulse pounded in his temples as he cautiously turned the doorknob. Unconsciously shielding himself, Jimmy clutched his books to his chest and stepped inside. The reek of booze socked him with an invisible fist. He turned around to run but stopped at the door. Over his shoulder he called, 'Mom?' in a high thin voice.

Jimmy scowled, cleared his throat and tried again in the deeper tone he acquired on his last birthday. 'Mom?'

No answer.

Jimmy glanced around. The living room was in shambles. *Had an intruder broken in*, he wondered. He slunk down the dark hall toward the kitchen, drawn toward the sound of cabinet doors and drawers being flung open and slammed. Someone must be searching for something and angry they can't find it. He gripped the doorjamb, pressed his face against his hand, and peered into the bright room. Forks, knives and spoons exploded from the cutlery drawer as it was yanked open. Jimmy shrunk back, but he had seen what he feared most. He closed his eyes and began to tremble.

'It's okay,' he whispered to himself. He took several deep breaths to calm his nerves, then squared his shoulders and stepped into the light.

'Mom, I'm home from school.'





WHY AM I HERE?

She wheeled around and glared as if he were a stranger – an intruder. She muttered something unintelligible under her breath then turned and began searching the cupboards again.

‘Where is it?’ she growled. Glancing over her shoulder at Jimmy she asked, ‘Have you hidden it, boy?’

‘No ma’am,’ he said as he inched into the kitchen.

She crunched across the broken glass that littered the floor. No liquid pooled in the shards, so he figured his mother smashed her bottle after she’d drunk it dry.

‘Ah, here you are,’ his mother crooned. Jimmy looked up hopefully. His mom was kind and gentle when sober. Unfortunately, her soft words were not for him. Her eyes were on the drink she craved. The deceitful beverage lured the weak with promises of bliss then betrayed them. It poisoned and robbed its lovers of their senses and replaced his mother with a monster.

She whipped around and fixed bloodshot eyes on Jimmy. ‘Get out of here! Why are you home? Get out! Get out!’

Jimmy dropped his shield. The schoolbooks he clutched tumbled to the floor. They had no real power to protect him. Pierced by words, he ran.

The chill wind that blew off Lake Michigan washed from Jimmy’s memory the smell of alcohol that saturated the apartment. He opened his mouth and sucked in deeply as he fled the few blocks toward the beach. Dark waves lapped the shore and their constant beating lulled his heart and slowed its pace. Jimmy threw himself on the sand, breathing hard and cursing the asthma his father genetically gifted him.

America had entered the war in December when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. But Jimmy’s personal battles seemed a lot closer to home than those in Europe and Asia.

‘I wish mother wouldn’t drink!’ he whispered to the fathomless blue sky that stretched above him. As he stared up, gravity drew tears down from the corners of his eyes across his temples. The thudding of his heart slowed to a regular thump,





THE TRUTH THAT TRANSFORMED ME

thumping. As he listened to its cadence, he imagined the pounding was the sound of the gears that churned the engines rotating the earth on its axis. His fingers dug into the sand to grab hold and keep himself from hurtling into outer space if the rotation of the planet ground to a halt.

The heavens stretched in an endless sea of blue, wider and deeper than the great lake that lapped the shore beside him. 'I know you're up there, God,' he said to the expanse. 'I know you've got to have more for me than this.' He threw a handful of sand backward in the direction of his apartment. He lay still and cupped his ear. 'I'm listening,' he whispered. 'Why am I here? Tell me what you want. I know you must have a purpose for me.'

A shadow moved over him, cooling the warmth of the sun. He shielded his eyes with a hand and looked up. Sand sprayed him in a shower of grit. Jimmy jerked up spitting. He brushed the grains from of his face and squinted at the dark form looming above.

'Your purpose is to deliver groceries,' said a large boy standing with legs wide apart and meaty fists planted on his hips. His bulk blocked out the sky. 'Get up and get going if you're gonna keep your little job.'

'You didn't have to kick sand in my face, George!' Jimmy yelled. He jumped up with fists full of the gritty ammo.

'Uh, uh, little brother.' George put his palm on Jimmy's forehead, holding the smaller boy at arm's length. Jimmy's fists punched air as he swung uselessly at his brother. 'Let me go!' he said through gritted teeth.

'Fine,' George said, abruptly jerking his hand away and stepping to the side. Jimmy stumbled forward and hit the ground on hands and knees.

'Why don't you save that energy for your grocery delivery bike. You'll need it to carry all those brown bags up the steps of Mrs. Stabler's apartment.'





WHY AM I HERE?

'You're just jealous that I've almost got enough money to go to Boy Scout camp. While I'm camping in the woods and getting my lifeguard certificate, you'll be stuck alone in the apartment with Mom and her booze.'

'Me! Jealous of you?' George barked out a harsh laugh. A deep line furrowed his brow and his mouth twitched down on one side. 'While you're gone I'll be having a party. Dad's gonna be back and he'll take me to do loads of fun things while he's home,' George said stretching his lips back in a rigid grin.

'That's a lie!' Jimmy yelled, balling his fingers into fists. 'He told us last time he was home that the glass company promoted him to a wider area. And you know what that means. He's gonna be gone on sales trips longer than ever.'

George put his palm on Jimmy's chest and shoved him backward. 'Shut up. That's all you know. You're just a kid.'

'Am not. You're just a year older than me,' Jimmy called over his shoulder as he ran off the beach. He shook his head to clear it from the verbal battle with his brother. He wished they could just be friends, but George never seemed to want him around. Jimmy trotted into the corner grocery store and stopped in front of the man behind the counter.

'Sorry I'm late, Mr. Needleman,' he said breathing hard.

'Better save your energy for delivering groceries, young man.' His tone was gruff, but a smile softened the words.

'Yes, sir. That's what my brother said.' Jimmy jerked a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the beach.

'I've got Mrs. Stabler's order ready.' The older man gestured at the brown bags standing at attention on the counter. 'Could you also deliver Mrs. Dunwoody's groceries before your clarinet lessons?' Mr. Needleman asked, raising bushy white brows.

'I think so,' Jimmy said, glancing at the old clock on the wall as he grabbed the sacks. He carried them to the bicycle parked in front of the store and loaded them into its basket.

School was almost out and summer waited impatiently at the edge of the month. He had worked all spring to earn enough





THE TRUTH THAT TRANSFORMED ME

to pay for Boy Scout camp. 'Only ten more dollars, ten more dollars, ten more dollars,' he chanted under his breath as he pedaled down the street to make his deliveries. In his mind's eye he saw the trails and trees of camp instead of streets and apartment buildings. The fresh air of wilderness braced him instead of exhaust from passing cars. He couldn't wait to get out of the big city and away from the strain of not knowing if his mom would be sober and kind or drunk and raging.

The afternoon raced by in a haze. At five o'clock Jimmy climbed the steps of the bus and paid the driver before finding a seat. With his forehead pressed against the cool glass of the window, he watched the shops and apartments of his neighborhood whisk by as the bus drove into downtown Chicago to his music lessons.

He daydreamed about the Boy Scout retreat. It was a great adventure to get out of the city and hike through dense forests and swim in the clear lake. Camp was a refuge from his troubled home, but only for a short time. Music was a different story altogether. It carried his soul beyond the bounds of earth to spiritual places he hardly understood.

It was dark when he came home from his lessons. He crept up the stairs of his apartment, quietly cracked open the door and looked in. His mother lay on the couch. He set the clarinet case on the floor and pried off his shoes with trembling fingers. The handle on the case whined when he picked it up. He stopped abruptly and shot a look at his mom. She didn't move. With a soft tread, he tiptoed across the floor and paused in front of her. With white knuckles, her hand gripped a bottle as if she feared someone might pry it away. She snored softly through her slightly parted lips.

Jimmy sighed and his shoulders sagged in relief. Mom was out for the night. Nothing woke her when she passed out. He walked into the bathroom, pushed the door closed behind him and turned the lock. The latch on his clarinet case gave a metallic clicked as he opened it. When he lifted out the glossy





WHY AM I HERE?

black instrument, he saw his reflection frowning distortedly back at him from the rounded surface. He perched on the edge of the bathtub, brought the reed to his lips, and blew. The music bounced off the tiled walls in a sad eerie echo. He smiled, closed his eyes and played on, as the moment of melody lifted his soul far above his bitter reality.

