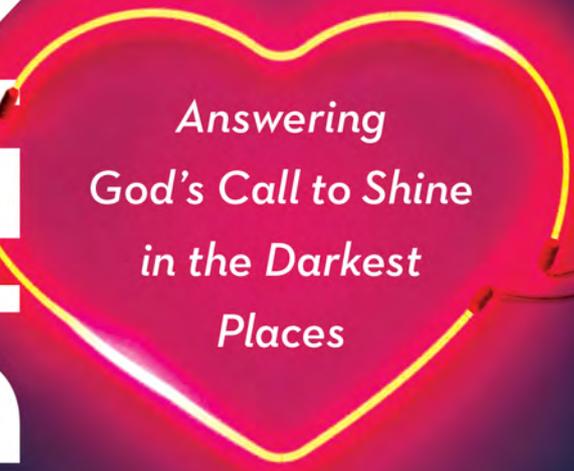


OUTRAGEOUS OBEDIENCE



*Answering
God's Call to Shine
in the Darkest
Places*

RACHELLE
STARR

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To the man who follows, acts, and trusts Jesus
to lead and love beyond himself.
Joshua, my love, none of this would be possible
without your dedication to the gospel
and sacrificial love both for me
and our family.
I love you.

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Learning to Go

There's a joke that a father's one responsibility is to keep his daughter out of a strip club. But my dad led me into them.

It all goes back to a little white church and the house next door.

The church had fourteen steps up to the entrance. A black iron cross hung over the portico, below the steeple. At the top of the steps, white double doors opened immediately into the sanctuary. A bright burgundy aisle carpet separated two rows of twelve oak pews surrounded by walls of varnished wood. At the front was the communion table, then the pulpit where my dad preached, and behind it the baptistry. The room could hold roughly one hundred people, but most often there were fifty or sixty in attendance on a Sunday morning.

If you peeked out a window to the right side of the church, you'd see the parsonage where my family lived. We had moved to Quapaw, Oklahoma, where my dad served

as part-time pastor of Quapaw Christian Church in order to support the family while he attended Ozark Christian College. I was five at the time, so it's the first church I remember. Though he was only part-time, my dad served as the only pastor—with both youth and senior pastor responsibilities. My mom organized potluck meals after Sunday church. There was rarely a day when my family wasn't doing something at the church or having someone in our home for dinner.

I will never forget one of those meals. My dad brought home a kid named Steven who had been abandoned by his parents. Dad found thirteen-year-old Steven sitting in an old-fashioned phone booth at the only gas station in our small town. He had suffered at the hands of his alcoholic father, who had left him in an abandoned house to fend for himself. My dad was curious as to why he was hanging out at the filling station. Steven told him, "My only way to provide for myself is to sell drugs or beg for money."

Dad took Steven back to the abandoned house where he was living. When my father saw that it was full of trash and filth, it broke his heart. Dad couldn't let him stay there. So over dinner that night, Dad told Steven, "If you will leave your life of drugs and go back to school, you can live with us as long as you need." Steven gave up all he had known and made us his new family. My dad converted the parsonage garage into a bedroom, and Steven lived with us until he graduated from high school.

Steven longed to be loved. I can say with confidence that this was the first time in his life he felt cared for, accepted, and safe. He would come to call my parents Mom and Dad and think of my brother and me as siblings. After

he graduated from high school, Steven got married and had a family of his own. I'm not sure if any of that would have happened if my dad had passed him by that day. My father's actions changed Steven's life . . . and mine.

When Dad brought Steven home, I was young, and my view of Jesus was still forming. Dad's example brought the Savior's mission to life for me. Jesus came for the sinners, the sick and dying, the outcasts and tax collectors, the thieves, murderers, and adulterers, the disabled, and the prostitutes. The Bible tells how Jesus was close to the brokenhearted, how he cared for the least of these and helped those who struggled to help themselves.

For my dad, the biblical accounts about the Savior were more than just stories. Jesus modeled the way we should live our lives today. We were to live in absolute—and what some might consider outrageous—obedience to the example Jesus set and the way he called us to live. Therefore, my dad believed our churches and homes should be filled with the people Jesus came to seek and save—the lost.

One evening, we heard a knock on our parsonage door. A man who introduced himself as Alfred asked for a shower and a place to sleep that night. Alfred had been diagnosed with HIV, and he was walking across America—yes, walking the entire country, because he wanted to do something

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extraordinary and see new places before the virus took his life. My parents let him shower, eat dinner with us, and sleep in the church basement since our little house was full. The next day, Alfred loaded up his things and left for the next city along his journey. That encounter sparked a desire in me to be available to God whenever he put people in my path.

You see, that little town with one stop sign was where I gave my heart and life to Jesus. I sat at the Dairy Queen and told my dad, “I am a sinner. I have messed up, and I need Jesus’s forgiveness. I want to give my life to him.” The very next Sunday I was baptized at the little white church with the iron cross. I came out of the water to a roomful of smiling faces, many belonging to people who were a lot like Steven and Alfred. At that point in my life, I had no way of knowing how much that place and those people would affect my faith.

The Temptation to Sit Still

Later, in my early twenties, my still-new husband and I moved to a suburb of Louisville, Kentucky, in Southern Indiana. Josh had taken a job at a great local church, using his web design background to serve the kingdom.

Our lives had begun to revolve around our local church. In fact, our apartment was located across the street.

In one sense, this was a familiar life to me. We now lived as close to the church where my husband worked as my family once had lived to the little white church where my dad served as pastor. But in another sense, there were miles of difference between life in that suburban church and what

I had experienced in childhood. Everyone who attended appeared so put together. I looked around and couldn't find any people who seemed lost or needy.

I grew up with my dad bringing into church the homeless, the town drunk, people who didn't smell good or stay awake. But then as I got older and began my own journey into the first church my husband and I were members of after being married, I would look around and wonder: Where were the homeless, the broken, the people who thought the walls would implode if they walked inside? Everyone I was around had grown up in the church or was a Christian; there were very few people who didn't look like me or smell like me in this church. I began to question how I was to be used in the church to bring in the sick and the hurting. I felt dissonance between my experience there and the string of stories I knew from childhood. In this suburban church of my young adulthood, I didn't see friends bringing the hurting to Christ. Honestly, I wasn't participating in God's mission myself. My obedience to his commission was definitely less than outrageous.

Do you know that feeling? Are you at that place? If so, have you thought about what's holding you back? Have you prayed about what's kept you from moving forward?

It might be that you've gotten comfortable. God has called us to go, but it's easy to sit. To say, "I'm too busy right now. Maybe later." To sit in a church pew week after week after passing that homeless woman on the corner for the hundredth time. Trust me, I know how tempting it is to sit and to settle. But God is calling us out of our comfort and into a risk-taking partnership with him. He wants us to join him in bringing compassion and help to a hurting world.

If it's uncomfortable, it could be that you're not sure others would approve of what you believe God is calling you to do. Jesus went to the darkest places and spent time with those who were thought to be the most sinful people. He hung out with and ate meals with thieves and prostitutes in a culture where godly people were not supposed to do that. He was okay with being misunderstood and criticized, and that probably means there's something greater on the other side of obedience if we will just take the risk.

Jesus was full of compassion. He didn't focus on himself and his own needs. His compassion led him toward the hurting. He didn't wait for others to come to him. He went out to touch the untouchable with healing and hope. And he's called *us* to do the same.

God, Where Do I Go?

Whatever the reasons, I found myself in early adulthood sitting rather than going. I began to ask, "God, what am I on this earth to do? Lord, you saved me, how do you want to use me?" My asking and seeking the Lord to show me his will was the beginning of a journey to discern my calling that lasted several years. When the call finally came, it was not what I expected, but I knew without a doubt my whole life had set me up for this: *God was moving me to go and share the hope of Jesus with women in the sex industry.*

Looking back, I can see that my experiences in the little white church and the parsonage next door are what ultimately led me to this ministry. My dad modeled for me how Jesus was always surrounded by sinful people who needed his grace, and how we, as his followers, should be as well.

I was, and I am still, amazed that God called a sinner like me to join him in his work. I'm amazed that he called me to shine his light in such a dark place.

I wonder how God has called you.

I don't know, but it wouldn't surprise me if God's call on your life involves something that seems too big, too dangerous, and too much. If you're feeling led to something that will take risky faith and radical obedience, that's probably God.

Over the past decade, I have not only had the opportunity to go to women in the industry and see them saved and disciplined, but I've also had the opportunity to urge, inspire, and compel others to find their calling and to be outrageously obedient.

A young woman approached me after I spoke at a conference. She had brown hair, a maroon sweater, and a bewildered look in her eyes. She said, "I've felt God put it on my heart to love people who are not like me, but it didn't make sense until now. It never dawned on me that I needed to *go to them*. I'm not even sure I can do that."

Another woman stood behind her anxiously waiting to chat. She seemed hopeful but nervous when she asked, "I'm in my fifties; I wish I had done what you did when I was in my twenties. Do you think it's too late for me to be used by God?"

There are also countless women who have told me, "Rachelle, the women you talked about. That was me. I may not have worked in a club, but I was lost and helpless

It wouldn't surprise me if God's call on your life involves something that seems too big, too dangerous, and too much.

just like them. How can I be a part of what God is doing to help other women?”

Talking with those ladies and hearing their questions helped me realize there are many women who have Christ’s heart of compassion. They want to see people as Jesus sees them. They desire to shine his light in dark places and to love the unlovely. Some of these women lack the courage to say no to fear and yes to all God has for them. A few need someone who’s been there to point the way—a model like my dad was for me.

I wonder if you can relate. Do you want to give your life in outrageous obedience to God’s call and Jesus’s mission? Do you need a friend to inspire you to be brave? Do you need direction, maybe a clear picture of where to begin?

My hope is that I can be that friend and that the stories I tell in this book will provide the imagination you need. I hope it will give you permission and direction, and that you’ll learn both from how I’ve followed Christ and from my mistakes.

As I write this, I’m praying you will:

- See that obedience to God’s call is rooted in a relationship with him.
- Know that it’s his faithfulness that fuels our mission.
- Be inspired, encouraged, and equipped to put your faith into action.

That’s where we’re going to travel together in the pages to come. Along the way, I’m going to tell you some crazy stories. We are definitely going to laugh, we may cry a few

tears, and you are going to see how loved you are and how much love you have to share.

I believe God is calling you to make a difference for him. No matter where you are—whether young or old, whether you're new to Christ or have known him for many years, whatever your background or current season of life may be. Girl, I want you to hear the Lord's call on your life and be unleashed to go be salt and light.

Wherever God is calling you, whether that be to a strip club, a homeless shelter, a pregnancy center, a mission field overseas, your church, your place of work, your neighborhood, or your home, my heart is that you'll experience eternal hope in Jesus through the pages of this book, that you will rise up to outrageous obedience, and that his light will begin to shine through you for the world to see.