



BACK COVER:

In *Outdoor Adventures and Faith Building Moments* the authors share true stories and relate them to life and faith. Laugh, learn, and connect with over 60 devotional adventures from all over the world ranging from the Arctic to the Alps to the Great Barrier Reef.

FUN ADVENTURES:

Fishing, Hiking, Camping, Hunting, Boating, Skiing, Scuba Diving, Rafting, Horseback Riding, Swimming, and Surfing.

EASY TO READ FORMAT:

- **The Adventure:** a real life outdoor story from Dan's life
- **The Field Guide:** explore the topic and dig into the Bible
- **The Campfire:** reflect and apply the truth to your life

MEANINGFUL TOPICS:

Storms of Life, Anger, Pride, Hope, Legacy, Honor, Joy, Pain, Trust, Forgiveness, Creation, Perseverance, and Control.

THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS:

- Who is your captain?
- What kind of legacy are you leaving?
- What is the danger of acting before thinking?
- What makes it hard to trust God?

FLEXIBLE STYLE: Read the adventures in any order. Choose your adventure by title, location, or theme.

MANY USES: Use the adventures for personal growth, small group studies, teaching illustrations, or for outreach. It is a great book to read on your own, but even better with friends or in a group. It makes a great gift for the outdoor adventurer in your life.

SAMPLE: DRAFT

**Outdoor Adventures
and Faith Building Moments:
A Devotional Book**

Dan Ely & Larry Ely

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Dedication

We dedicate this book in loving memory to our father and grandfather, Colonel Lawrence Daniel Ely for his leadership, mentoring, love, and sense of adventure.

Contents

Quick Guide: How to Use This Book

Foreword

Introduction

1. **Who's Your Captain:** North Sea, Sweden
2. **Horses in the High Sierras:** Inyo National Forest, California
3. **Lava Tubes:** Mojave Desert, California
4. **What's That Thud?:** Catalina Island, California
5. **Bald Faced Hornets:** Allegheny Mountains, Pennsylvania
6. **The Blizzard:** Mammoth Mt., California
7. **Death Spiral:** Interlaken, Switzerland
8. **The Wedge:** Newport Beach, California
9. **Cottonwood Conundrum:** Lake Grapevine, Texas
10. **Hazardous Hunting:** Snow Shoe, Pennsylvania
11. **Rising Waters:** Lake Berlin, Ohio
12. **The Narrow Road:** Bergen, Norway
13. **Apollo 11:** Kennedy Space Center, Florida
14. **The Great Barrier Reef:** Coast of Australia
15. **Wake Up Call:** Canton, Ohio
16. **Sailfish On!:** Acapulco, Mexico
17. **SCUBA Diving:** Catalina Island, California
18. **The Bench:** Crescent Beach, Florida
19. **Sacrifice and Teamwork:** St. Thomas Island, Caribbean
20. **Mile Swim:** Dale Hollow Lake, Kentucky
21. **Castle on the Rhine:** Rhine River, Germany
22. **Raft Trip:** Klarälven River, Sweden
23. **Adrift:** Lake Nacimiento, California
24. **The Cornice:** Mammoth Mt., California
25. **Fishing Pole:** Union Lake, Michigan
26. **Deer Hunting:** Wooster, Ohio
27. **Keepers of the Light:** Rose Island, Rhode Island
28. **The Big Storm:** Lake Erie, Ohio
29. **Red Headed Woodpecker:** Lake Berlin, Ohio
30. **The Pig Roast:** Ravenna, Ohio
31. **Midnight Sun:** Arctic Circle, Sweden
32. **Grunion Run:** Baja, Mexico
33. **Windsurfing Adjustments:** Turkeyfoot Lake, Ohio
34. **The Good Samaritan:** Colorado River, Arizona
35. **Soaring Like Eagles:** El Mirage, California
36. **The Black Forest:** Bavaria, Germany
37. **The Train Ride:** Alps, Switzerland
38. **Anchors Away:** Catalina Island, California
39. **Beach Camping:** San Clemente, California
40. **Pontoon Ride:** Lake Berlin, Ohio

41. **Dodgers Baseball:** Pittsburg, Pennsylvania
42. **The Honda Shop:** Palos Verdes, California
43. **Hunting Trip:** Snow Shoe, Pennsylvania
44. **Red Tide:** Redondo Beach, California
45. **Sunscreen is for Wimps:** Catalina Island, California
46. **Lifted Up:** Alps, Austria
47. **Lost and Now Found:** Palm Coast, Florida
48. **Björn, Bikes, and Buses:** Göteborg, Sweden
49. **Against The Current:** Matanzas Inlet, Florida
50. **Skiing The Matterhorn:** Zermatt, Switzerland
51. **Chair Skating:** Lake Berlin, Ohio
52. **Trouble on the High Seas:** Coast of England
53. **Hope in the Rope:** Deschutes River, Oregon
54. **Turkey Roast:** Canton, Ohio
55. **Exit Now!:** Deschutes River, Oregon
56. **Big Catch!:** Intracoastal Waterway, Florida
57. **Leap of Faith:** Palm Coast, Florida
58. **The Other Left:** West Branch Lake, Ohio
59. **Waterfalls:** Niagara Falls, New York
60. **Jack's Boat:** Colorado River, Arizona
61. **Easter in Death Valley:** Death Valley, California
62. **Ice Fishing:** Lake Pymytuning, Pennsylvania

Acknowledgements

Theme Index

Activity Index

About The Authors

Quick Guide: How to Use This Book



The Adventure:

This section is the main story that drives the devotional. It is a collection of true stories from my life and my adventures around the world. Laugh, smile, relate, and enjoy!



The Field Guide:

This section is designed to guide you toward God and the ultimate field guide: The Bible. It is here that the main point of the story is discussed and related to Scripture.



The Campfire:

This section is all about you! It is the heart of the book where adventurers reflect on their own journey, share thoughts, and apply what they have learned to their lives.

Foreword

Outdoor Adventures and Faith Building Moments is more than a devotional book. It is exactly what we need today. “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17, NKJV). John MacArthur comments on this verse, “The benefits of intellectual discussion encourage joy through a keener mind and the improvement of good character which the face will reveal”.¹

Dan and Larry have teamed up to share some incredible experiences and then they ask the hard questions of “what, why, and where” as they transition to a personal walk with God. Taking God’s Word, they graciously begin the process of sharpening our hearts, and minds; asking us to deal with our past mistakes and victories.

In joining them in this journey, they will take you from the thrill of skiing the Matterhorn to watching the magnificent sunset on the beaches of southern California; from the spiritual high and excitement of experiencing God through extraordinary moments to slowing down and being still and thankful while reflecting on another day filled with God’s grace and forgiveness.

God’s creation is bursting with spiritual lessons if we will look for them. All of us could use a little sharpening.

-Dr. David Beauchamp

Senior Pastor
Crescent Beach Baptist Church
St. Augustine, FL

¹ MacArthur, John (2005). *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, p.724. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Introduction

Welcome to *Outdoor Adventures and Faith Building Moments*! Join my dad, Dan, and I as we explore life, faith, and the great outdoors. I hope you are ready to jump in and journey together.

First, my dad will kick things off by inviting you along on one of his real life adventures from around the world. He has been blessed to travel to many places and unusual locations and hopes to share his experiences as a creative way to engage your faith. Join him as he shares his life and his heart; laugh at his poor choices, learn from his shortcomings, and relate to his love for adventure.

Then, together we'll meet up with you during the Field Guide and Campfire sections to help you dig into the topic, study the Bible, and apply the principles to your life.

Over the years, my dad and I have shared many outdoor adventures and made many memories as father and son, but it is the faith building moments that have bonded us together as brothers in Christ. We hope that you will journey with us, reflect with us, connect with God, and come away with a deeper faith as a result.

-Your Fellow Adventurer, Larry

1. Who is Your Captain?

(North Sea, Sweden)

Insert Image 1 here

The Adventure:

I was excited to go fishing with two friends, Rich and Em, on a charter boat in the North Sea off the coast of Sweden. We were to meet at the dock before sunrise, so we loaded the car and drove several hours to a small seaport on the North Sea. It was a foggy damp morning in June, and it was hard to see the road signs along the curving roads close to the sea.

We finally found the dock and the fishing boat with about 10 other Swedish fishermen on board. We slowly motored from the dock out to sea. Due to the thick fog, it took a few hours before we could get up to speed. It was cold, and we wished we had a cup of coffee. We told fish stories and wondered what type of fish we would catch. The fog slowly burned off and the sun was bright, the seas were calm and the captain said it was about an hour to the first fishing spot.

The captain was a classic “Salty Sea Dog” with a white beard and jolly disposition. He turned to us and asked if we would like a mug of coffee. Yes, we couldn’t wait! I took a big gulp and tasted more alcohol than coffee! It was not what I was expecting, and I set the mug down. It didn’t taste good. The captain kept drinking his thermos of “coffee” and after an hour we reached our first spot. We all dropped our lines and hoped to be the first one to catch a big fish.

After a while, no one had caught any fish. The captain pulled the anchor, and we tried another spot. Again, we fished for a while, but we caught nothing. The other guys on board were speaking Swedish and talking to the captain. Soon, the talk increased to shouts and anger. We weren’t sure what was going on, but it became clear that the captain was stone cold drunk. He could barely pilot the boat!

The captain started to take us to a buoy marker where he had previously set up traps and lines. He tried to maneuver the boat to the buoy, but couldn’t do it. Another fisherman took the helm, reached the buoy, and pulled up the big line. To our surprise, there were over 50 fish! Apparently, the captain felt bad that we hadn’t caught anything so he told us to take a bagful of fish with us. There was a big variety of cod, herring, redspot, mackerel, and an assortment of others. Another local fisherman on board got us back to port since the captain was unable to do it. Thankfully, we didn’t get stuck miles out at sea! It was strange to return with fish we didn’t catch ourselves, but at least we got safely back to port and had a fish story to tell.

Insert Image 2 here

The Field Guide:

Often, when we get on a ship, airplane, ferry, or train, we take the captain for granted. We assume the captain, pilot, or engineer is trained, qualified, and not drunk! Usually, we don’t even think about it and we get from point A to point B with no problem. The real question is, “Who is Your Captain?” Are you piloting your own life or are you

trusting God to steer the boat? Many times in my life I have been off course because I relied on my own faulty understanding and my own ability instead of relying on God. Be smart and avoid a shipwreck by making the Lord the captain of your life.

- *“Trust in the LORD and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart’s desires. Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you.” -Psalm 37:3-5 (NLT)*
- *“The LORD says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.” -Psalm 32:8 (NLT)*
- *“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” -Deuteronomy 6:5 (NIV)*

Insert Image 3 here

The Campfire:

1. What is so dangerous about having a bad captain?
2. Who is your captain? Who or what is steering your life?
3. If you haven't already, what would it take for you to let go and let Jesus be the captain?
4. Why do you think we sometimes give God control for a while, but then we take it back?
5. Are you ready to trust God with the direction of your life and put your faith in Jesus?

2. Horses in the High Sierras

(Inyo National Forest, California)

Insert Image 1 here

The Adventure:

My wife, Linda, and I were only married a few years when my father-in-law, Gene, invited us to go on a High Sierra pack trip for a week. My wife's sisters and grandfather also joined us. We gathered all of our camping gear and headed out for the Inyo National Forest near Lone Pine, CA.

Our trail boss, Roy, explained that the horseback ride would take eight hours up the switchback trail to eleven thousand feet. Since I was the biggest, I got to ride Big Jim. He seemed like a fine horse, and although I was not a seasoned rider, I wasn't a novice. Once all six of us were ready to go on our mounts, off we went to camp and fish in the High Sierras!

We rode along a beautiful mountain stream with tall pines on both sides. I had never experienced anything so amazing! Over the next week, we'd fish the crystal-clear lakes where we could see fish swim, just waiting for our bait or lures. We'd catch all the rainbow and golden trout we could eat and hike to the top of the surrounding peaks, which still had snow on them in June. But before all that, I was soon to find out Big Jim had a few adventures of his own for me.

After Roy left, we were ready to continue up the mountain, when all of the sudden Big Jim took off running up the trail without me! Then fast as lightning, Gene mounted his horse and took off chasing him up the trail. It looked like an old cowboy movie as they galloped out of sight. Big Jim knew that Roy was gone and he could do whatever he wanted. If only that was the end of the story, but it was just the beginning.

We waited on the narrow trail hoping for Gene to return. After a short time, he came riding down the trail with Big Jim in tow. We all had a laugh and continued the climb. After a long day, we arrived above the tree line and made camp beneath the giant granite rock outcroppings nearby.

Over the next week, we fished the crystal clear lakes where you could see the trout swim and take your bait or lure. We caught all the rainbow and golden trout we could eat. We took beautiful hikes to the top of the surrounding peaks, which still had snow on them in June.

Gene was a marine and could cook delicious meals over the campfire. He would have hot strong coffee ready for us early in the morning with fried potatoes, eggs and biscuits. We had a daily cribbage tournament and told tall fish tales.

After a memory filled week, it was time to head back down the mountain. Roy brought back the same horses and told us to start down the trail and that he would catch up with us. Big Jim was to lead the way, so I headed him toward the trailhead. As soon as Roy was out of sight, Big Jim started acting out to show that he was the boss. Big Jim took

me to a large meadow and started bucking me with all his might! I jerked right, left, up, down, and held on as long as I could but he launched me into the air. I hit the ground with a heavy thud. My pride was hurt along with a few body parts, but I got up.

I wasn't sure what to do next. None of the other horses would move toward the start of the trail, and Jim would not let me near him. Fortunately, Roy returned and got Big Jim's attention and straightened him out! Needless to say, we did not have any more horsing around from Big Jim after that. The ride down was actually harder than the ride up, and boy were we sore in the saddle when we made it to the bottom.

Insert Image 2 here

The Field Guide:

Over the years, my wife and I reminisce about the fun High Sierra adventure and when I was bucked by Big Jim. I apply this story to my life when something unexpected throws me off my horse. I always have choices to make and in the case of Big Jim, I had help with the situation- a trail boss that straightened out who was in control. Likewise, we have Jesus, the power of prayer, good friends, and Christian support groups to help us back on the horse of life. In the Bible, Job was complaining to God about his woes and being bucked by life and God answered:

- *“Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane? Do you make him leap like the locust? His majestic snorting is terrifying. He paws in the valley and exults in his strength; he goes out to meet the weapons. He laughs at fear and is not dismayed; he does not turn back from the sword. Upon him rattle the quiver, the flashing spear, and the javelin.” -Job 39:19-25 (ESV)*

Sometimes in life we have to dig deep inside ourselves, give it all up to God, and persevere in our faith. Check out what Paul says about pressing on:

- *“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” - Philippians 3:13-14 (NIV)*

Insert Image 3 here

The Campfire:

1. What in your life has bucked you off your horse or knocked you down?
2. How did you respond to the event?
3. Could you have responded better?
4. What would it take to get back up, dust yourself off, and ask God to help you move on?

3. Lava Tubes

(Mojave Desert, California)

Insert Image 1 here

The Adventure:

Soon after the Apollo 11 lunar landing and the examination of lunar rocks, I had the opportunity to take a course in lunar geology and the science explaining volcanic activity. We learned about underwater volcanic flows, fault lines, and even about volcanism on the moon.

The class took a field trip from Los Angeles, California, through the desert to Pisgah Crater, a young volcanic cinder cone rising above a lava plain in the Mojave Desert. We had 10 cars in our caravan and the professor would lecture like a tour guide over a radio as we drove. We could hear him through walkie-talkies in each vehicle. He told us to bring jeans, old clothes, flashlights, and boots.

When we arrived, we followed him as he climbed over very sharp lava outcroppings. Often, we crawled on all fours over the rugged terrain. When lava is hot and flowing, it forms rivers of molten lava and traverses the landscape following the path of least resistance. When the lava cools and hardens air gets trapped and forms lava tubes. We were climbing on collapsed lava tubes which made the going slow.

Eventually, we followed our professor into a tunnel which was an intact dark lava tube. We turned on our flashlights and continued crawling on all fours. We arrived in a pitch black cave and sat down. We turned off our flashlights and sat in a semicircle facing the cave wall. Then a battery operated projector was turned on, and our professor began teaching us about Pisgah Crater. We were so impressed with his surprise presentation and the fact that he even had packed box lunches and drinks for all of us. It is easy to understand why I remember this course as one of my favorites. It was real, it was hands-on, and we came away understanding lava formations because we experienced it ourselves.

Insert Image 2 here

The Field Guide:

The lava tube adventure stuck with me because it was a tangible experience and we got to apply geological principles first hand. Sometimes the Bible can be difficult to grasp because we didn't experience the events ourselves. Other times, we read or hear the truth of the Bible, but we never put it into practice and live out the principles it teaches. When we live out what the Bible teaches our lives become living examples of its principles. In addition, when we turn Scripture into an adventure and use creative experiences to teach it to others, we help it come alive for them in a powerful way.

- *"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do." -James 2:17-18 (NIV)*
- *"But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves." -James 1:22 (NLT)*

Insert Image 3 here

The Campfire:

1. Have you ever had a learning experience that was hands-on and you still remember it vividly? Explain.
2. What are some ways you have tried to apply the Bible to your life and live it out?
3. Can you think of a lesson or principle of the Bible that you need to put into practice in your life?
4. What could you do to create a fun hands-on adventure that helps people learn the Bible in an exciting and engaging environment?

4. What's That Thud?

(Catalina Island, California)

Insert Image 1 here

The Adventure:

The University of Southern California had a marine lab in a small lagoon near the isthmus at Catalina Island, and I was conducting research for a pilot project. The lab had a small wooden rowboat for work around the docks, and my wife and I borrowed it for a few hours for a fishing diversion to take a break from my research.

We rowed out to the middle of the cove and casted a slender blue lure into a school of fish. They were nice sized Bonito and gave a great fight on my medium weight tackle. We pulled them in with each cast and had caught around a dozen fish. I started cleaning them and throwing the guts and heads overboard.

Soon, there was a loud thumping noise on the bottom of the 12 foot rowboat. Thud. Whap! Thud. I looked over the side of the boat to see what it was and panicked! I immediately grabbed the oars and started rowing as fast as I could for the dock. There were several Catalina blue sharks almost as long as the boat, feasting on the fish guts, and their tails were whacking the boat! I was mad at myself for being so careless. I never even thought about sharks right there in the cove, and they could have easily capsized the boat.

Thankfully, we made it back to the dock and were okay. Creating our own shark infested waters was not a great way to impress Linda, and my youthful excitement put us in danger. However, we did have a nice dinner of grilled Bonito that night.

Insert Image 2 here

The Field Guide:

I was excited to catch the fish and get them cleaned, but I had not thought about the consequences of my actions. I was not fully aware of the danger that I had put us in by cleaning the fish in the open water. It was a foolish mistake that could have ended badly. Foolishness and wisdom are often compared and contrasted in the book of Proverbs. Check out what the Bible has to say about the way of the fool versus the way of the wise.

- *“The wise are cautious and avoid danger; fools plunge ahead with reckless confidence.” -Proverbs 14:16 (NLT)*
- *“A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.” -Proverbs 22:3 (NLT)*
- *“He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.” - Proverbs 28:26 (NIV)*
- *“A wise man fears the LORD and shuns evil, but a fool is hotheaded and reckless.” -Proverbs 14:16 (NIV)*

Insert Image 3 here

The Campfire:

1. Have you ever done something really stupid or foolish? What happened?
2. How would you describe the differences between a wise person and a foolish person?
3. How have you tried to pursue and apply wisdom to your life?
4. What is the danger of acting before thinking things through?
5. What is something in your life right now that you could use God's wisdom to figure out?

5. Bald Faced Hornets

(Allegheny Mountains, Pennsylvania)

Insert Image 1 here

The Adventure:

It was a relaxing Fall weekend in the Allegheny Mountains. My buddy, Rich, and I had taken a trip to the beautiful forest and enjoyed hiking the unmarked trails, fly fishing for trout, bird watching, and taking naps outside in the sun. One afternoon, we were just sitting out front of the hunting lodge telling and spinning fishing tales. As we were talking and smoking pipes, I noticed a swarm of insects by one of the windows. Curious, I slowly wandered over to have a closer look.

As I got closer something came towards me and then flew off. I wondered if they were bees or something else? As a lover of science, I wanted to study it closer and got within a foot of the nest. Suddenly, a swarm of bald faced hornets attacked me! I made a dumb mistake and the smoke from my pipe had angered them! As I swatted at them, I knocked off my glasses and started running full bore for the front door of the hunting lodge. I slammed the door and felt stings all over my arms and face! I heard Rich roaring, and when I came out of the lodge he was belly-ache laughing at the great entertainment I had provided.

We returned to our fishing stories, and I did not think much of it until my arm, hand, and neck began to swell. I was not allergic to bee stings, but I had never been bitten by a bunch of hornets. After some time, Rich noticed my neck and face were getting red and quite swollen. My hand had swollen so much my ring was hurting my finger, and I felt warm and dizzy. We were getting nervous that I might need to go to the hospital if things got worse. Fortunately, the swelling went down, and I didn't have to go to the emergency room. Later, I was able to laugh with Rich about being stung by a bunch of hornets, even though I deserved it!

Insert Image 2 here

The Field Guide:

Getting stung by hornets hurts, but sometimes getting stung by people can hurt even more. The sting of people's words, insults, personal attacks, lies, deception, indiscretions, injustice, unfair treatment, and betrayal can leave deep wounds. The pain can rise within us and it can be hard to heal and forgive. We need God, the Great Physician, to heal our hearts and minds.

- *"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." -Colossians 3:13 (NIV)*
- *"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." -Psalms 147:3 (NIV)*

Insert Image 3 here

The Campfire:

1. Have you ever been stung by an insect or animal? What happened?
2. Have you ever been stung by people's words, lies, actions, attacks, sinful behaviors, betrayal, or unfair treatment? How did you respond?
3. Is there a sting in life you need God's help to heal from and forgive?

6. The Blizzard

(Mammoth Mountain, California)

Insert Image 1 here

The Adventure:

My friend Jack and I headed to Mammoth Mountain, California, for a weekend of skiing. We had been good friends since grade school and were looking forward to two days of non-stop skiing. Day one was a blast, and we skied black diamond runs, chased each other through the moguls, and tried to be the wildest and coolest skiers. Jack had four brothers and was used to being wild and crazy. By the end of day one, we were exhausted but happy.

Day two began with snow flurries, and we continued to ski in spite of poor visibility. The wind picked up and snow flurries turned into a blizzard. We headed to the highest peak before the lift closed and raced down the mountain non-stop. We thought we knew the runs well enough and raced to be the first one to the bottom. I was really flying fast and knew that I was ahead of Jack. When I was almost to the bottom, the blizzard was so bad that I was skiing blind.

Suddenly, I launched into the air and didn't know why. I was gliding through the air for what seemed like a long time, but I couldn't see anything. Then bam! I hit something very hard, and my head cracked against a wall of snow. I was stunned and tried to get my bearings. I had flown over a ravine, crashed into the far side, and was sliding to the bottom. Both skis were ripped off and the safety leather straps were broken.

When I came to a rest at the bottom, I could not feel my feet. I was dazed and confused. The blizzard prevented me from seeing where I was, but I heard voices. One of the voices was Jack calling my name. I responded, and Jack and a ski lift operator crawled down the ravine to help me. I was fortunate to not have broken both my ankles and slowly started to feel my feet again. They were able to help get me out of the ravine, and I was able to recover with just some bumps and bruises.

Insert Image 2 here

The Field Guide:

Racing my friend through a blizzard was a bad idea! I was skiing blind and should not have been. I was very fortunate to see again and not be seriously hurt. I thank God that I was ok. As I reflect on this mishap, I am reminded of Jesus healing the blind man. Jesus heals his physical blindness, but also addresses the spiritual blindness of the religious leaders who did not believe it.

- *“He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” -John 9:25 (NIV)*
- *“We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” -John 9:31-33 (NIV)*

- *“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked. “My rabbi,” the blind man said, “I want to see!” And Jesus said to him, “Go, for your faith has healed you.” Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus down the road.” -Mark 10:51-52 (NLT)*

Insert Image 3 here

The Campfire:

1. Have you ever been caught in a snowstorm? What happened?
2. Have you ever been cruising through life with blocked or obstructed vision?
3. What can you do to see important issues in your life more clearly?
4. How would you rate your level of spiritual understanding vs. spiritual blindness? Explain.

7. Death Spiral

(Interlaken, Switzerland)

Insert Image 1 here

The Adventure:

My family was on a summer vacation in Interlaken, Switzerland with our daughter, Julie, and her husband, Steve. My wife and I had been there many years before and had enjoyed the beautiful Alps, the trails lined with wild flowers, and hiking on the glaciers. While we were traveling through the area, Julie saw paragliders soaring over the alpine peaks. We watched them slowly gliding down over the mountains for a while. It looked like so much fun that she decided to go for it. My wife's motherly instincts took over, and she did not like the idea. She tried to discourage Julie from going but to no avail.

As we made our way to the landing zone to get her signed up for a tandem jump, Steve and I got our cameras out to document the adventure. The participants loaded up in a van with the instructors and headed to the top of the mountain. As they prepared to jump, all we could see were tiny little dots on the mountain. We knew the color of Julie's paraglider and could just barely see it as a yellow dot in the sky from the valley below. The bright yellow canopy soared slowly back and forth with the snow-capped mountains in the background. We got some fantastic pictures of her descent.

As she got closer, we could distinguish her face. Suddenly, her paraglider made a sharp downward turn and her and the instructor spiraled rapidly to the ground as if they were crashing. Steve and I just about had a coronary heart attack thinking they were going to crash. Then right before touchdown, the instructor smoothed out the sail, they swooped up, and touched softly on the ground for a perfect landing. What a relief! What we didn't know was the instructor had asked Julie if she wanted to do a death spiral and she did. It was scary to watch, especially because we didn't know what was happening. We were so thankful to God that she was safe, and it was a strong reminder that life is a gift.

Insert Image 2 here

The Field Guide:

Life can be going smoothly, and we can easily forget that events can change rapidly and can suddenly spiral downward without notice. During my lifetime many events have occurred that I never expected and often caused life changing adjustments. No one likes it when life spirals out of control, when pain and suffering come, or when our plans are dashed. Thankfully we have a merciful God who wants to help us through life's difficulties. He often provides answers to prayer, a community of believers, and Biblical guidance. Hold on to the One who sees all, knows all, and cares deeply for you.

- *“O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you restored my health. You brought me up from the grave, O LORD. You kept me from falling into the pit of death. Sing to the LORD, all you godly ones! Praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.” -Psalm 30:2-5 (NLT)*

- *“I am suffering and in pain. Rescue me, O God, by your saving power.” -Psalm 69:29 (NLT)*
- *“So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” -Genesis 22:14 (NIV)*

Insert Image 3 here

The Campfire:

1. Have you or someone you know had a near death experience? What happened?
2. How do you respond when life deals you a downward spiral?
3. How hard is it to trust God when life feels out of control?
4. How has God helped you through some of life’s difficulties?

Insert Image 16 here, centered. Caption: Julie and instructor descending from Alps

8. The Wedge

(Newport Beach, California)

Insert Image 1 here

The Adventure:

The Wedge is located at the east end of the Balboa Peninsula in Newport Beach, California, and is known for its large wedge-shaped waves. It is a popular spot for surfing and can produce huge waves up to 30 feet high. When conditions are right, and a wave approaches the shore at the proper angle, an approaching wave will reflect off the jetty creating a second wave. The reflected wave hits the following wave and forms a bigger peak than either wave had alone, therefore earning its nickname The Wedge.

The beach at The Wedge is steep, resulting in what is known as shore break which can slam you very hard into the sand. The backwash itself frequently creates another outgoing wave. The combined effect of the unpredictability of where the incoming waves will break and the strength of the backwash is both exciting and very dangerous!

My buddies and I decided to take the challenge and body surf The Wedge on a day with 10-15 foot waves. It was so exciting and unpredictable! Observers would stand on the beach and cheer on the fantastic wipeouts and great rides. Because of the very strong currents, backwash waves, and shore pound, body surfers wore heavy duty fins tied to their ankles to keep them from getting ripped off.

My buddy, Steve, and I swam out past The Wedge, treaded water, and waited to get our nerves up. A nice-formed wave came, and we took off racing across the face of it. We hit the oncoming wedge from the breakwater, flew up in the air, and then rode that wave toward the beach. It was so intense! The force of the shore wave was so strong. We tried to avoid being washed up on the coarse sand or, even worse, having the water beneath us disappear and face planting in the sand. We rode several waves and had a few wipeouts! After a couple runs, we were exhausted and got out to catch our breath and watch for a while.

Insert Image 2 here

The Field Guide:

While riding The Wedge, I had very little control of the situation and its unpredictable nature threw me around like a rag doll. Sometimes in life, I feel this lack of control and struggle to find a way to control things. Life can be unpredictable, and it can be challenging to find our way. At times like these, I have found it helpful to put my faith in the Lord and surrender control to Him. I have come to realize that I do not have to be in control of everything, but I do need to trust the Lord in everything.

- *“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!” - Psalm 46:1-3 (NLT)*

- *“Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.” -Psalm 62:8 (NIV)*
- *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” -John 14:27 (NIV)*

Insert Image 3 here

The Campfire:

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you were out of control? What happened?
2. How hard is it for you to let go of control and to surrender things up to God?
3. What is going on in your life right now that feels out of control?
4. Pray and lift your situations up to God. Ask him for help, for peace, for protection, and provision.

9. Cottonwood Conundrum

(Lake Grapevine, Texas)

Insert Image 1 here

The Adventure:

It was a sunny summer day in Dallas, Texas. My wife, Linda, and I were on the southern leg of our camping adventure around the United States. We had departed from Los Angeles over a week ago, and had traveled through Arizona and New Mexico. We planned to meet my high school buddy, Tom, and his wife at the campsite. It was late in the afternoon when we pulled our Dodge pick-up truck with a cab-over camper into the Lake Grapevine campground.

We were on day 9 of our trip, and I was tired after a long day's drive. Our usual routine was to select a campsite, set up our chairs, and relax before grilling dinner. As Linda got out of the truck to help me back up into the campsite, I started backing up before she was ready to guide me. Suddenly, I heard a thud and a loud scraping noise! I stopped and jumped out and went to the back of the camper. I was alarmed and mad to observe I had pierced the back wall of the camper with a 6 foot cottonwood branch which was now hanging over the dining table inside the camper.

I was so angry at myself, and I tried to break it off, but I couldn't. I had to get the saw and cut the branch off. I was embarrassed by my uncool backing up style, so to redeem myself I told Linda that I was going to go get a couple of nice steaks to grill from the store.

I hopped back in the cab and hurriedly put the truck in gear. As I drove forward, I heard a crunching sound. Oh no! What now? I saw Linda just shaking her head in disbelief. I had run over our lawn chairs! Now, I was really angry! I was super mad at myself, tired, hot, and frustrated.

As I got out of the truck, I noticed a couple in the next campsite that had been watching the whole thing. They were trying not to laugh and very tactfully asked if I would like a cold drink. All I really wanted was to go get those steaks, but I took the water and tried to collect myself. Linda and I sat with them for a bit and had some friendly conversation which ended up in laughter at the whole mess I had made. Eventually, our friends arrived, and we had steak and took the boat out on the lake.

Insert Image 2 here

The Field Guide:

I should have waited to back up the truck and been more patient. In my anger and haste I ended up doing more damage. Anger has a way of distorting our perspective and often causes the issue to escalate. Thankfully, the kind campers saw my frustration and offered some comfort which slowly turned my anger into laughter. Anger is a frequent topic in the Bible, and God warns us not to sin in our anger and to keep it under control.

- *“People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.” -Proverbs 14:29 (NLT)*

- *“And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil.” -Ephesians 4:26-27 (NLT)*
- *“But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.” -Colossians 3:8 (NLT)*

Insert Image 3 here

The Campfire:

1. Have you ever done something stupid and in your anger created an even bigger problem? What happened?
2. Have you ever lost your temper and lashed out in anger? Explain.
3. Have you ever been hurt by someone and your response was to get even? What happened?
4. How have you tried to help others calm down and get perspective when they were angry?

10. Hazardous Hunting

(Snow Shoe, Pennsylvania)

Insert Image 1 here

The Adventure:

October in central Pennsylvania is bow hunting season for deer. The leaves turn colors and the weather is usually gorgeous. My friend, Rich, and I had been going to the Snow Shoe area to go deer hunting for several years. We enjoyed hunting in the early morning, hiking in the afternoon, and fly fishing the Black Moshannon River.

This particular morning, we arrived at our deer posts before sunrise and were positioned on both sides of a grassy area. Sometimes we used tree stands, but today we were kneeling behind trees. We had been watching for deer for several hours, but nothing. As the sun rose my mind would daydream, and Rich and I got sleepy.

He was about a 100 yards from me and had changed from standing to sitting against a tree. I was about to doze off when I heard Rich yell! I looked over toward him, and he was motioning me to come over to him quickly. I thought maybe he heard or spotted a deer in the distance.

As I approached, he was holding his thigh. I asked him what was going on, and he had fallen asleep with his arrow resting in his bow. When his head dropped forward, the sharp broadhead tip stabbed his thigh! The arrowhead cut him like razor blades, and he was bleeding. The big game whitetail deer hunter had shot himself with a bow and arrow! I thought it was hilarious! I helped bandage him up, but couldn't help but laugh. The only thing we wounded that day was his leg and his pride.

Insert Image 2 here

The Field Guide:

Good friends usually tease each other, and Rich and I were no exception. I didn't let him live this story down for a long time. We would often tell stories on one another, and humble each other by reminding ourselves of our silly mistakes and shortcomings. We enjoyed talking smack on the racquetball court, and competing for the biggest fish or largest deer. Whenever our pride or ego got too big, out would come one of a dozen stories to humble us and put us in our place. The Bible often warns us to watch out for pride and to seek to be humble.

- *“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” -Proverbs 16:18 (NIV)*
- *“Pride ends in humiliation, while humility brings honor.” -Proverbs 29:23 (NLT)*
- *“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.” -James 4:10 (NLT)*
- *“But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” -Matthew 23:12 (NLT)*

Insert Image 3 here

The Campfire:

1. Have you ever accidentally injured yourself? What happened?
2. Can you think of a time when your pride or ego was overinflated? Explain.
3. Can you think of a time when you were humbled by someone or something? Explain.
4. Why is pride so dangerous? What can you do to pursue humility?

Acknowledgements

Larry and I would like to thank God for helping us write this book, and we give glory to Him for the wonder of creation. We thank God for parents that taught us to appreciate the balance and beauty of nature, and we thank the Lord for the Scriptures that have guided us on our many adventures. We would like to extend appreciation to our wives Linda and Tina for their continued encouragement, creative ideas for the book, and help with editing. We would also like to thank Xulon Press for their publishing expertise.

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-Dan

Theme Index

Insert page numbers

1. **Who's Your Captain?:** *(trust)*
2. **Horses in the High Sierras:** *(falling down)*
3. **Lava Tubes:** *(faith and action)*
4. **What's That Thud?:** *(foolishness/ wisdom)*
5. **Bald Faced Hornets:** *(forgiveness)*
6. **The Blizzard:** *(blindness)*
7. **Death Spiral:** *(hardship)*
8. **The Wedge:** *(lack of control)*
9. **Cottonwood Conundrum:** *(anger)*
10. **Hazardous Hunting:** *(pride/ humility)*
11. **Rising Waters:** *(storms of life)*
12. **Narrow Road:** *(salvation)*
13. **Apollo 11:** *(honor)*
14. **The Great Barrier Reef:** *(creation)*
15. **Wake Up Call:** *(refocus)*
16. **Sailfish On!:** *(faith and action/ legacy)*
17. **SCUBA Diving:** *(trust)*
18. **The Bench:** *(joy in pain)*
19. **Sacrifice and Teamwork:** *(sacrifice)*
20. **Mile Swim:** *(off course)*
21. **Castle on the Rhine:** *(closed doors)*
22. **Raft Trip:** *(whirlpools)*
23. **Adrift:** *(drifting)*
24. **The Cornice:** *(refocus)*
25. **Fishing Pole:** *(legacy)*
26. **Deer Hunting:** *(following God)*
27. **Keepers of the Light:** *(be a light)*
28. **The Big Storm:** *(storms of life)*
29. **Red Headed Woodpecker:** *(marriage)*
30. **The Pig Roast:** *(reflection)*
31. **Midnight Sun:** *(praise/ creation)*
32. **Grunion Run:** *(abundance)*
33. **Windsurfing Adjustments:** *(adapting)*
34. **The Good Samaritan:** *(helping others)*
35. **Soaring Like Eagles:** *(weakness/ renewal)*
36. **The Black Forest:** *(timing)*
37. **The Train Ride:** *(risks)*
38. **Anchors Away:** *(trust/ measure)*
39. **Beach Camping:** *(prayer)*
40. **Pontoon Ride:** *(storms of life)*
41. **Dodgers Baseball:** *(honor)*
42. **The Honda Shop:** *(consequences)*
43. **Hunting Trip:** *(stillness)*
44. **Red Tide:** *(environment)*

45. **Sunscreen is for Wimps:** (*comfort*)
46. **Lifted Up:** (*overcoming*)
47. **Lost and Now Found:** (*perseverance*)
48. **Bjorn, Bikes, and Buses:** (*mentoring*)
49. **Against the Current:** (*worldly living*)
50. **Skiing The Matterhorn:** (*awareness*)
51. **Chair Skating:** (*enjoying life*)
52. **Trouble on the High Seas:** (*obstacles*)
53. **Hope in the Rope:** (*hope*)
54. **Turkey Roast:** (*mistakes*)
55. **Exit Now!:** (*danger/ warnings*)
56. **Big Catch!:** (*legacy*)
57. **Leap of Faith:** (*faith*)
58. **The Other Left:** (*off course/ self reliance*)
59. **Waterfalls:** (*encouragement*)
60. **Jack's Boat:** (*being prepared*)
61. **Easter in Death Valley:** (*creation*)
62. **Ice Fishing:** (*measuring rod/ off course*)

Activity Index

Insert page numbers

ANIMALS:

- 5. Bald Faced Hornets
- 29. Red Headed Woodpecker
- 57. Leap of Faith

BOATING:

- 1. Who's Your Captain?
- 23. Adrift
- 28. The Big Storm
- 38. Anchors Away
- 40. Pontoon Ride
- 45. Sunscreen is for Wimps
- 49. Against the Current
- 52. Trouble on the High Seas
- 55. Exit Now!
- 58. The Other Left
- 60. Jack's Boat

CAMPING & HIKING:

- 2. Horses in the High Sierras
- 3. Lava Tubes
- 9. Cottonwood Conundrum
- 15. Wake Up Call
- 31. Midnight Sun
- 39. Beach Camping
- 54. Turkey Roast
- 61. Easter in Death Valley

DIVING & SWIMMING:

- 14. The Great Barrier Reef
- 17. Scuba Diving
- 19. Sacrifice and Teamwork
- 20. Mile Swim

FISHING:

- 4. What's That Thud?
- 16. Sailfish On
- 25. Fishing Pole
- 32. Grunion Run
- 56. Big Catch
- 62. Ice Fishing

FLYING:

- 7. Death Spiral
- 13. Apollo 11
- 35. Soaring Like Eagles
- 46. Lifted Up

HUNTING:

- 10. Hazardous Hunting
- 26. Deer Hunting
- 43. Hunting Trip

PEOPLE:

- 18. The Bench
- 30. The Pig Roast
- 34. The Good Samaritan
- 41. Dodgers Baseball
- 48. Bjorn, Bikes, and Buses

SNOW SKIING:

- 6. The Blizzard
- 24. The Cornice
- 36. The Black Forest
- 50. Skiing the Matterhorn

MISCELLANEOUS:

- 12. The Narrow Road
- 21. Castle on the Rhine
- 27. Keepers of the Light
- 37. The Train Ride
- 42. The Honda Shop
- 51. Chair Skating

WATER & SURFING:

- 8. The Wedge
- 11. Rising Waters
- 22. Raft Trip
- 33. Windsurfing Adjustments
- 44. Red Tide
- 47. Lost and Now Found
- 53. Hope in the Rope
- 59. Waterfalls

About the Authors

Insert Image Author 1 here, centered.

Dan Ely is a retired Physiology Professor and Medical Researcher with over 40 years of experience in teaching and research. He has spent many years investing, leading, and mentoring young couples and students. Dan and his wife, Linda, live in Northern Florida and enjoy nature and living on the water.

Insert Image Author 2 here, centered.

Larry Ely has over 25 years of experience in Student Ministry and Student Leadership as a pastor, speaker, writer, and coach. He enjoys helping students grow in their faith, eating tacos at the beach, and going on adventures with his family. Larry and his wife, Tina, have two wonderful sons, Devon and Dray.