

THE ATHEISTS WHO BELIEVED IN ANGELS: MISSIONS

BY ALEX MORRISON

Like most children who grow up in a home schooled environment, I lived a somewhat sheltered life for most of my childhood. I only knew the people that I went to church with and/or those who were in my home school group. With this somewhat limited circle of friends, I had never really met a person who thought differently than me about anything, much less God. Needless to say when I had to go to public school, I had several eye opening experiences.

I encountered many new things, some were really good, and others, well, weren't. One thing that I really liked was the people; there were more people in a school of 1200 than I had ever been around before. See, I am a very extroverted person; I like to meet new people and make new friends. I was always the person that never had a best friend, because everyone was my friend. I found this very difficult when getting friendship necklaces, but anyway people were/are my favorite. Then there were the things that were bad, well I guess they really should not be labeled as "bad," but the things that had a somewhat temporary negative effect, that was later changed into a positive effect. Anyway, I began to worry about what people thought about me, what I wore, what kind of pens I had. You know, all the really dumb stuff that is important when you are in middle school. And with this new desire to be "popular" came a desire to avoid conflict, a desire not to be different. So when my friend, the self proclaimed artist, said that she was an atheists but believed in angels, I was floored. "What? You don't believe in God? Like what is wrong with you? What drug are you on? And no, I did not blurt all of this out; I just stood there quietly and did not say a word.

People that know me now may be shocked at the fact that I, of all people, did not have anything to say, but at that point in my life I really had no idea what it was like to share my faith. So when the Artists said these things, I could not get it out of my mind, I just could not believe it. I guess that I had known there were people in the world that did not think the same way I did, but they lived in bad places, like New York, or something. And then I finally came up with something really good to tell her, something that would make her believe in God. However, it was about three days later, and I thought it was too late to say anything. I never talked to the Artist about God after that day; I had failed and did not think I could ever do any better. I have always wished that I would have said something, anything, but God was still working on me.

One of my second eye openers was when I became best friends with a Mormon. Yeah I know your thinking, I am making this up, because first, good Baptist girls do not associate with Mormons, and second I am not the type to have 'best' friends. Well, as both of these things were true at that point in my life, I really think it was a work of God that we ever became friends. The first time I realized that there was something different about my new friend is when we were talking about our weddings. (Boys, this is something that girls do all the time, starting when we first learn what a wedding is, so it is not an unusual topic.) Anyway, we were both under the impression at the time that we would be friends forever, as all girls are in the seventh grade, so I assumed that we would both be in each others weddings. But when the topic came up of what her bridesmaids' dresses would look like, she told me that she did not get to have bride's maids, because they got married in the temple, and only the bride and groom and the preacher were allowed in.

"Oh," I said. "So, what church do you go to? I was under the impression at that point, that the way people believe was based solely on the church that they went to. "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," she told me. Well I thought this sounded pretty good, I mean it had Jesus in it. Well, as time went on and I learned more about the differences between her "church" and mine. So, I decide that I would look into it a bit. I found out that it was a bad deal, a cult, and so I decided that this time I was going to say something, to win this soul for the Lord. So I was ready, I was pumped up, I had my Bible in hand, and I, the most amazing Christian in all the world, well at least in North America, was going to have this heathen saved.

Yeah, I was stomped into a million little pieces and grounded into the floor. She knew way way more about what she believed than I did, and she had an answer to ever single question that I asked. She was prepared to defend her faith; I barely knew what mine was. And thus I began a quest. Well it may have not been really a quest, but quest is a really cool way of saying that I was determined to never let that happen again. Little did I know that this was going to take me the rest if my life, but as I kept searching God kept shaping me. And I know that that sounds very cliché, but that is really what happened.

Not too long after that, I went on my first mission trip. Ok, well, my first real mission trip, you know, the ones that you go to another country, where they speak a different language. So, anyway I learned about a quattuordecillion things in this trip-Yes that is a real number, it means that there are 45 zeros after a one-well at least a lot, but there are a few things that were most important. First of all, I used to distain public speaking. Yeah I know you don't believe me; a person who likes people should be fine with talking in front of them. Ok, first of all, I never lived to be the center of attention; I lived to be in the center of attention. I like to be in a group of people, in the middle of all the buzz. But did you know that on mission trips you have to get up in front of a bunch of strangers and tell them about what God has done in your life? Yeah, it's scary- a whole lot of

eyes looking just at you. Well, I learned two things. First of all, interpreters are the most amazing thing in the whole wide world. They not only take some of the attention off of you, but they also can fix it when you mess up, and nobody is ever the wiser. The second thing I learned is that God enables you to do whatever His will is. But, the hard part is, you don't know that God is going to speak through you until after you start talking. It is the most nerve racking, miraculous thing that ever happens.

The next summer, my church was going to take students back to the same town in Mexico. We had been the summer before, and, of course, I had to go. I was really excited about going; I thought it was going to be really easy because I had all ready been on a real mission trip the year before. But what I did not know is that God still had a whole lot to teach me. It was a weird feeling because I sort of expected God to do something, I mean, I had seen Him do so much before. I just did not know how far He could push me out of my comfort level.

When we got there, the leader of the group informed me that I, of all people, would be leading a group. I thought he was crazy. I mean, there were plenty of older people there who could lead just fine. And I know that all of you are thinking I am making this up, that I would not mind leading a group, but you're wrong. See, I used to, and still do at times, feel awkward leading people, especially my peers and people who are older than me. Well guess who got put in my group: two single people in there thirties, a teenage interpreter, and a twenty five year old native, who did not speak a drop of English. Needless to say, I was terrified. Then I found out that my interpreter had never been an interpreter before, and that the two single folks had never shared their testimony before, and well I had no idea about the native because I could not understand a word he was saying. I had absolutely no idea what to do. So, I did what all people are supposed to do on mission trips. I prayed. I really did not know where this was going to get me, or how the whole prayer thing worked, but I quickly figured out that it is one of the most powerful things in the world. First of all, God gave me wisdom far beyond what I could ever come up with. I mean like it was really good stuff, so obviously I did not come up with it.

For example, the single lady I was with was convinced that she could not share her faith with anyone, that she would mess up or something. I knew that she would love it as soon as she did it, but I did not know how in the world I was going to get her to try. My first idea was that I would just wait until she saw everyone else do it, and then maybe she would warm up to the idea. But for some reason, God just put into my heart that she had to go first. It was really cool because I told her that she had to go first or we were not going to talk to anybody at all. She did, and she loved it. Later she told me that she was so glad I made her go first, because otherwise she thought she would have never gone. I was much relieved to tell her that I had nothing to do with it.

While I was leading this group God also taught me something else: the power of prayer- real prayer. The kind where you have no idea what is going to happen. See, we took turns going in groups of threes, so there were always two of us who were left to pray. I was usually left with the native. And even though we had no idea what he was saying, I knew that he was seeking God with all of his heart, and I saw God show up time and time again. One of my favorite and most memorable times was when our interpreter was crippled with a terrible headache. And no, I am not some sadist who takes pleasure in other people's pain. See, we had given him medicine had he still felt so bad he could not stand up. I mean, what in the world were we going to do without him? All I knew how to say was "taco". But then the cool part happened. I said, "Lets pray for him, we have not tried that yet." Oh how small my faith was, as though God was not going to work out everything. So, we all put our hands on him and prayed. His head ache went away. Now you can say that it was just the medicine or adrenaline kicking in, but I am under the impression that it was God. I got to know God a whole lot better that week in Mexico, how He works, well at least some aspects of it, and to use a great 90's saying, He is really "cool".

Wow, can I just stop and say that God is pretty much the most amazing person ever. Wait, not even pretty much, He is the most amazing person ever. Ok, so back to my story. This is really a story about what God decided to do in this spec's life. So anyway, I am focused now, I had the privilege, ok so that is a corny word but just work with me, to go to Argentina. Yeah, I was really excited; I mean, I had seen all of these amazing things that God had done before, and I was excited about Him doing them again. But then, I decided to be Alex. See, I was getting cocky, and I thought that I was going to be super-witnessing- Christian all on my own. Yeah, I fell, and I fell hard.

I was paired with Cody, my interpreter from South Carolina. He had been living in Argentina for a while, learning Spanish and how to be a preacher. We went for four days, talking to tons of people, and nobody came to the Lord. I could not believe it; I could not figure out what I was doing wrong. And then Cody noticed how sad I looked, I was almost in tears. He sat down and gave me a reality check. He talked to me about God, and how we have to let God work through us, and not try to do it all by ourselves. We prayed and I turned it all, half-heartedly, over to God. The next day we were talking to two women. They had been through so much, and I knew that their hearts were ready for God. But after talking to them for almost an hour, they still did not want Him. So we prayed for them and started to leave. I was about to give up, and then I remembered what Cody had said, and I just gave it to God. That was hard for me, but this amazing peace rushed over me. I know that sounds very "Christian," but it felt like when a person dumps a bucket of ice cold water on your head in the middle of July, you are shocked and then feel very relaxed. Anyway, right at this moment, I heard a lady in

broken English saying my name. She ran over to me and started speaking really, really fast in Spanish. I don't know why she thought I could understand her, but thankfully Cody was there, and he got this really big smile on his face and started talking to her really really fast in Spanish. Finally they took a breath long enough for me to ask what was going on. Cody told me that she wanted Jesus. I mean, it was just one of those moments where you expect the heavens to open, a bright light to pour down and to hear some "ahhhh" sound. Yeah, our God is really awesome. We will only get out of the way long enough to let Him do His thing. That was in April, and I was signed up to go back to Mexico that summer, and when I got back my mind started spinning.

I have struggled a lot with missions, evangelism, furthering the kingdom, whatever you want to call it. See, I really like it, I mean, like a way super lot. So, does this mean that I am called to missions? How is a person called, what does it mean if I am called? The last time I went on a mission trip, it was my third visit to Mexico and I had already been through the routine. You pack as little as possible while at the same time be prepared for absolutely everything. Anyway, this trip was different from the other trips that I had been on. I did very little door-to-door work on this trip, I just served people. This was GREAT, because I love serving people. For a few days, I worked in a medical clinic sorting through hundreds of samples of medicine. Other days I taught teenage girls English. I got up at about seven every morning, and every night I went to bed at around one or two. Needless to say, I was exhausted. Then, something that I have struggled with and still do happened. Really late, on the last night we were having our group devotion. The leader of our trip was sharing with us once again about the spiritual battle that we were going through. And then he had us all take time to pray, and think about what God wanted us to do, wanted us to take away from this experience. He asked those of us who were being called by God to pray aloud, surrendering to Him. I sat there and struggled, struggled with God. There was nothing emotional about it, like some of the others, but it was a big fight. In the end God won, but the think that I do not understand is what He won. I said aloud that I surrendered my life to His will for me, but I still had no idea what that was. When it was all over, I felt very weird. I did not know really what had happened. Did I do that just because? Or was I tired? I go back to the fight that was going on inside of me, and I remember not wanting to do it, so I really do think it was real. Did I surrender to the minister? No. But I am still not certain where I stand on this.

I love missions; I love telling people about my Jesus: I love serving other people; I love being in other countries. I struggled with these questions for a long time, and came to some sort of conclusion. Every Christian is called to share Jesus with others, and why would we not love sharing the most amazing news this world has to offer. I know this to be true, and I was ok with this until recently. Every time I hear about another people- a group who has not heard about Jesus or is oppressed or is in great need for missionaries, my heart

aches. It hurts for these people, and I want to do something about it. I don't know what this is; I don't know how to respond. Does this mean that God is really calling me to full-time service, or is it just in our Christian nature to think this way? I don't know the answer. I am still unresolved.