



May-June, 2017

THE CALL

It is an honor and a privilege to introduce you to my friend and brother in Christ, Kevin DeVries, the Founder & President of Grace Explorations. He is a father of champions, a son of immigrants, an inspirational speaker, explorer, entrepreneur, author, and national men's ministry leader from Grand Rapids, Michigan.



After climbing five of the seven continental summits, skiing to the North Pole, and searching for Noah's Ark as a Lead Mountaineer in the award - winning documentary FINDING NOAH, Kevin endured divorce, bankruptcy, and loss of home to reach the naked soul of man. Kevin's story of riches, to rags, to redemption is heart-breaking and life-transforming. Only through understanding God's grace, "God's best & brightest idea," did Kevin find true healing.

Today, as an Inspirational Speaker, Kevin ministers to thousands of men, women and students each year at national faith conferences, church services, school chapels, corporate and community events in West Michigan and across the world.



Kevin DeVries, Chapel Speaker, Cornerstone University Christ Chapel, April 5, 2017

THE CALL

The call of God is like the call of the sea; no one hears it but the one who has the nature of the sea in him.
- Oswald Chambers

The sun and sand were blistering hot on the Jersey Shore on Sunday, August 3, 1980. Though I was only 12 at the time, the sea called out to me. It wanted to give me a gift — a call that would take a lifetime to accept and achieve. As I stood watching the waves crash and retreat upon the shore, something shiny caught my eye — the *Mother of Pearl*, the iridescent coating inside a shell rolling in the surf. As the sea retreated before me, I felt like my Dutch immigrant parents reclaiming land and all its treasures from the sea like our forebears of old. But when I reached for the shiny treasure, I realized too late, I had strayed too far into the surf and was sucked into a dangerous undertow. My little body began to tumble, end-over-end in the washing machine of the Atlantic Ocean. While I heard the sound of sand and shattered shells rolling inside the surf, I began to wonder: “Is this what it’s like to die?” Just when I felt like my lungs were about to explode, the ocean released me. I popped to the surface, wild eyed and gasping for air amidst the oceans angry foam. Wave after wave, charging like a white-plumed cavalry, crashed over me as I attempted to swim towards shore. Eventually, I stumbled onto the beach with a swimsuit full of sand, ears ringing and *seaweed wrapped around my head*.¹ As I convulsed and heaved saltwater, a strange sensation washed over me. I laughed and cried all at once like one drunk on life. The same sea that can drown you also has a way of intoxicating you with life. I was never more alive or aware of my surroundings in my short life than I was in that suspended moment.

To this day, I can still smell the sun tan lotion, turpentine-soaked boardwalks and the salt and seaweed of the sea that permeated the air that memorable day. I can still see the billowing sails of tall ships move across the deep green sea like cotton ball clouds in a bluebird sky. The seagulls haunting cry, the rippling laughter of children playing on the beach, the flapping kites dancing and diving in the wind amidst the thundering surf, still fills me with a sudden longing for home. Going to the sea is going home. Home where rainbow-colored beach umbrellas whisper of promises yet to be fulfilled — the promise of a genesis, of a

new beginning and rebirth. In that moment, while the hot sand seared my feet, I felt like Jonah, a castaway of grace, belched from the belly of a whale, resurrected somehow to live and tell a strange tale.

As a 12-year old boy on our family's annual vacation with my parents and three siblings on the Jersey Shore, I could not begin to comprehend how one day, like Jonah, I would run from my destiny. I would set sail for a sea without memory only to be *hurled into the deep*² by others including myself who must betray me so destiny could swallow and spit me up whole on the shore where I was first supposed to be — at the foot of a holy mountain that leads to Him. In a desperate attempt to externalize through exploration what I could not internalize through my existence, the untreated trauma from my past would carry me to the ends of the earth to reach the end of myself only to find a new beginning in God that never ends. I would embark on an epic adventure whose only guarantee was a changed life upon an uncertain return. Along the way, I became a prisoner of hope — an unwitting accomplice to a divine conspiracy that offended my mind to open my heart inside the belly of a whale called Life.

While I sank into the depths of despair, I discovered *the call of God is like the call of the sea* — a sea that can sink a man's soul *to the roots of the mountains*³ — *the mountains of Ararat*⁴ where I searched for Noah's Ark as a Lead Mountaineer in an award-winning film: FINDING NOAH, released nationwide in 2015 and now available wherever DVD's are rented or sold. Noah's Ark has captured the world's imagination for several millennia. The Flood story and the Ark are shared in part by all the world's major religions. It is a master archetype of literature and depth psychology and a metanarrative of oral history that has covered the planet with nearly 500 flood legends on six continents thousands of years before the rise of global communication. In Finding Noah, I searched for the Ark of history on top of a mountain, only to find the arc of my story in the depths of the sea:

The greatest discovery in life is what you find while you're looking for something else.



Noah found God's grace that saved him long before he built the Ark.⁵ I didn't know it at the time, but I was searching for the same mystery that filled a man with marvel while the world drowned in madness. As heaven's sanity drowned me in man's madness, the idols of a perfect life I once worshipped more than

God, would shatter into two failed marriages, bankruptcy and loss of home. My life felt like sand and shattered shells rolling in the surf. I could only be proud of one thing: God's grace. Suffering delivered me from shame and humiliation to give me the gift of humility so I could learn a valuable lesson: *Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.*⁶ In my search for Noah's Ark, I sought that which I could not find only to be found by that which I could not lose – God's grace.⁷ A grace so vast, there is no place I could be where God's grace was not already there. Grace is like water, descending into the deepest depths of our depravity to drown us into our deepest life where we learn to breathe where there is no air.

None of that really mattered to me on Sunday, August 3, 1980. I was content to be alive, to be a boy with his whole life as wild and wonderful as the ocean before him — an ocean that would soon turn a tomb into a womb to birth something new inside my boyhood dreams. Today, the only thing I wanted to find was an empty shell gleaming with the *Mother of Pearl*. I wanted to hear the sound of the sea inside the iridescent shells winding chambers, churning and grinding the sands of time into events least understood. If time can only tell what eternity means to say, I couldn't begin to understand then what I barely know now: I was searching for an echo of eternity, the sound of many waters in the human heart where the Holy One hides eternity.⁸

When I finally found my iridescent treasure and listened to the sound of the sea inside of the shell, I heard something else — church bells. The bells were ringing from the high tower of the Great Auditorium in Ocean Grove, NJ — "God's Square Mile At The Jersey Shore." Founded in 1869 by a group of Methodist clergymen who formed the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association. Ocean Grove remains to this day the longest-active camp meeting site in the US. There was *deep magic* in the sand and surf of Ocean Grove. Time had little meaning there. The movement of the sea and stars seemed to succumb to Sundays Sabbath so a boy's waking dream could be heard as a life calling in the sound of the sea.

While the bells tolled, I was caught in the riptide of eternity. I surrendered to the moment and no longer resisted the divine movement swirling about me. After my Jonah-like experience on the Jersey Shore, a quick shower and a clean change of clothes whisked me away into another world. As our family approached the Great Auditorium, I wondered to myself if we were entering the Ark of Noah? Huge, barn doors swung open as majestic waves of music rolled out to greet us from the auditoriums wooden, barrel-shaped, cavernous hall inside where magnificent golden pipes spiraled to the ceiling as if they were vines one could climb into the sky where tall tales and legends still live. The pipe organs multiple rows of ivory keys were arrayed in such a way as to appear like a mouth gaping wide in wonder, teeth bared and gleaming in glory. The choir swayed like sailors on a ship in high seas. Sunlight filtered through stained glass so the six thousand shining faces gathered inside appeared like a field of tulips in the first light of spring. Above us, the oceans fragrance wafted through high panels that opened to the sea. Hungry souls sang a rousing chorus as if they were one of every kind of animal inside an Ark, eating the distance between heaven and earth with praises to the One. I heard the call of eternity that morning. It sounded like the roar of many waters in many voices by the sea. The depths of eternity spoke to the depths in me. It sang a song from the furthest shore into my soul on the Jersey Shore. The souls of mankind are like the sea — deep, silent and churning with dreams that drown death into life.

As fate would have it, on this particular Sunday morning, August 3, 1980, Colonel James Irwin, one of only 12 Apollo Astronauts to land on the moon, spoke at the Grand Auditorium. He spoke as a man from another planet with a message to our own. Dimensions collided and time wrinkled while he spoke of his dream to find Noah's Ark. The atmosphere was supercharged with God particles. It was as if we were all astronauts of awe on a spaceship that crash-landed into another dimension and we were the happy few survivors wandering amongst its glorious ruins. The dust of heaven mingled with that of the earth while a launch sequence to a boyhood dream was about to begin.

As Irwin led a half a dozen expeditions to Ararat throughout the 80's, his dream became the dream of many others including my own. Legends of an Ark landing on top of a mountain like a spaceship on the surface of the moon, ignited and fueled my imagination for decades to come until I too would set foot on the lunar-like landscape of Mt. Ararat searching for the same lost ship Colonel Irwin sought but did not find

before he took his final voyage home in 1991. I would go on to search for Noah's Ark every summer from 2009-2013. And with every foot I climbed, drilled and excavated upon the glacial ice of Mt. Ararat's nearly 17,000 Ft. peak, I began to discover:

The Greatest Journey Is Within.

The longest journey in the world is the 18-inch journey from the head to the heart. If we are unable to traverse those 18 inches, we are forced to climb 18,000 feet or travel 18,000 miles. We always externalize what we cannot internalize. To find home we may have to lose our minds to find our heart as home. Our house is not our home. Home is where the heart lives. Far too many of us live in a house but we are never really home. Jesus Christ, the Son of God had no place to lay His head because He was always at home in His heart. Our future runs through our past. We're all exiled, nameless kings and queens in a foreign country who must climb our own Mt. Ararat — 'The Painful Mountain' to discover our powerful purpose encrypted in our pain. Mountains of pain exist to be climbed to find our purpose. We do not conquer the mountain, only ourselves. Mountains are not moved by man. Mountains are moved when God moves the heart of man. Mountains are climbed when we are changed. When we cannot change our circumstances, we must trust God to change our character instead. We are climbers, not criminals. We are patients, not prisoners. We are no longer prisoners being punished. We are patients being perfected. Pain is more than punishment. We hurt to heal. We cannot heal if we cannot feel. The way up is down. The way out is in. We must descend to ascend. Nothing heals in thin air. The higher the destiny, the lower the descent. We climb our misery to find God's message:

Love is the mountain that conquers us as we climb towards God.

Until our hearts are healed, we are exiled, nameless kings and queens, buried under a mountain of pain. God concealed an Ark in awe so that under its frozen frame we find our new and numinous names. The search for the Ark is not about finding an Ark so much as it is about recovering awe. God's glory is secrecy. The glory of man is the search so God's majesty is revealed not in mastery but mystery.⁹ My story is about the true, mythic journey every person must embark upon to recover their heart like the Ark frozen in ice as the last remaining link to a shimmering world now lost in the flood of shame. A heart that lives without shame and pain is as mysterious as the pre-flood antediluvian world. Instead of imagining a lost world where larger than life dinosaurs roamed and rumbled the ground like massive tanks and flew in the air like fighter jets and mankind could live to be a thousand years old, imagine where dragons of fear are killed with kindness, memories lost are found and even hope and faith are drowned in an ocean of love. Imagine an earthly paradise where hurts can finally be healed with the weapon of wonder that is only a shadow of the City of Light yet to come.

I can now say what Jonah said, "*You brought my life up from the pit.*"¹⁰ Always remember this: God often chooses His candidates from the pit as a passage to the palace. That's worth a wild ride to "*the far side of the sea*"¹¹ where a whale spits you out exactly where you were meant to be in spite of yourself for Him. May this ancient promise be yours today: "*I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.*"¹²

Kevin DeVries

References: 1. Jonah 2:5, 2. Jonah 2:3, 3. Jonah 2:6a, 4. Genesis 8:4, 5. Genesis 6:8, 6. Jonah 2:8, 7. Ephesians 2:8-9, 8. Ecclesiastes 3:11, 9. Proverbs 25:2, 10. Jonah 2:6b, 11. Psalm 139:9, 12. Isaiah 45:2,3

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