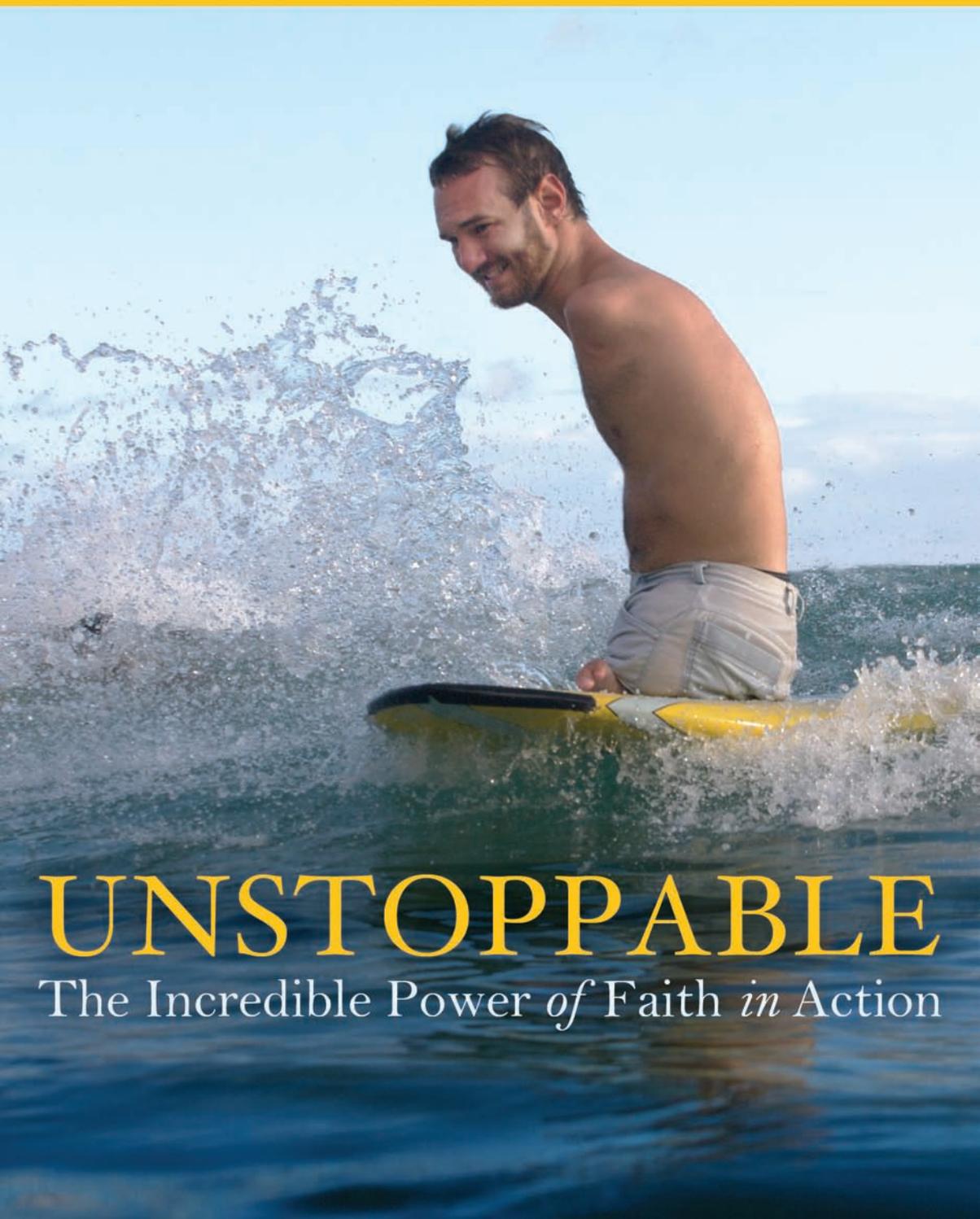


NICK VUJICIC

Author of *Life Without Limits*



UNSTOPPABLE

The Incredible Power of Faith *in* Action

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P R E S S

UNSTOPPABLE

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*In loving memory of the father-in-law I'll meet in heaven,
Kiyoshi Miyahara.*



*I dedicate this book to my wife,
Kanae Loida Vujicic-Miyahara,
my greatest gift and joy ever, after salvation itself.*

CONTENTS

	Introduction	I
ONE	Faith in Action	5
TWO	Rising from a Fall	29
THREE	Matters of the Heart	49
FOUR	A Life of Passion and Purpose	77
FIVE	Body Weak, Spirit Strong.	101
SIX	Winning the Battles Within.	127
SEVEN	Fighting Injustice	149
EIGHT	Letting Go to Reach Higher	177
NINE	Sow Good Seeds	197
TEN	Living in Balance.	223
	Acknowledgments	239

Introduction

WELCOME TO MY *SECOND* BOOK. MY NAME IS NICK VUJICIC (PRONOUNCED *Voo-yi-chich*). Even if you did not read my first book, *Life Without Limits*, you may have seen my videos on YouTube or attended one of my appearances around the world as an inspirational speaker and evangelist.

As you probably know or can see from my cover photograph, I was born without arms or legs. What you cannot see but might have sensed already is that my lack of limbs has not kept me from enjoying great adventures, a fulfilling and meaningful career, and loving relationships. In this book my goal is to share with you the unstoppable power of faith in action that has helped me create my own ridiculously good life, despite my disabilities.

Putting faith in action is about believing and achieving. It's about having faith in yourself, your talents, your purpose, and, most of all, in God's love and His divine plan for your life.

This book was inspired by the many people of all ages from around the world who've asked me for advice and guidance in dealing with specific challenges in their own lives. They know from my speeches that I have overcome adversities, including my youthful thoughts of suicide, concerns about being able to support myself and whether I'd ever find a woman to love me, my experiences with bullying, and other issues and insecurities that are not unique to me by any means.

The chapter topics address the most common questions and challenges people raise when they speak and write to me, including

- personal crises
- relationship issues
- career and job challenges
- health and disability concerns
- self-destructive thoughts, emotions, and addictions
- bullying, persecution, cruelty, and intolerance
- dealing with matters beyond our control
- how to reach out and serve others
- finding balance in body, mind, heart, and spirit

I hope that sharing my stories and those of others who have persevered through their own trials and hardships—many of them far greater than mine—will help and inspire you to overcome whatever challenges you face. I don't have all the answers, of course. But I have benefitted from wonderful advice from many wise people as well as the love and blessings of my heavenly Father.

I think you will find the guidance in these pages practical as well as inspiring. It's important to keep in mind as you read that you are never alone. Help is available from friends, family members, teachers, counselors, and clergy. Don't think you have to handle your burdens by yourself.

Remember, too, that there are probably many others who've faced and met the same challenges you encounter. This book also will share the stories of people I know and stories from others who have written to me to share their experiences. In some cases I've changed their names, but the stories are authentic and always inspiring for the courage, faith, and perseverance they exhibit.

As a boy trying to come to terms with my disabilities, I made the mistake of thinking no one else hurt like I did and that my problems were insurmountable. I thought that my lack of limbs was proof that God did not love me and that my life had no purpose. I also felt that I could not share my burdens—even with those who loved and cared about me.

I was wrong on all counts. I was not alone in my suffering. In fact, many people have dealt with challenges that surpass mine. And God not only loves me, He created me for purposes that I never could have envisioned as a child. He uses me in ways that continue to surprise and amaze me each and every day.

Know that as long as you are on this earth, there is a purpose and a plan for you too. God loves you, and there are many people around you—loved ones and professionals—willing to help you with your challenges. The burdens you carry may seem daunting, but as you will see in the pages that follow, the power of faith in action is truly incredible.

To begin to understand this, simply keep in mind that this man with no arms and no legs travels the world, reaching out to millions of people, while blessed with joy and love beyond measure. I am as imperfect as anyone you will ever meet. I have good days and bad. Challenges rise up and knock me flat on occasion. Yet I know that where I am weak, God is strong, and when we put faith into action, we are unstoppable.

ONE

Faith in Action

NEAR THE END OF MY 2011 SPEAKING TOUR IN MEXICO, AN OFFICIAL WITH the US embassy in Mexico City called to inform me that my US work visa had been put on hold for “a national security investigation.”

I live in the United States on that visa because I am a native of Australia. I could not return to my California home without it. Since my staff had scheduled an upcoming series of speaking engagements in the United States, this was a serious problem.

I scrambled to the US embassy with Richie, my caregiver, early the next morning to try to figure out how my visa had anything to do with national security. When we arrived, we found the large reception area packed with people dealing with their own issues. We had to take a number, like in a bakery. The wait was so long I had a nice nap before we finally were called to meet with an official.

When I'm nervous, I turn to humor. It doesn't always work. "Is there a problem with my fingerprints on the visa?" I joked. The embassy person glared at me. Then he called his supervisor. (Maybe my sense of humor was posing a threat to American security?)

The supervisor arrived, also looking quite grim. Visions of being behind bars crept into my head.

"Your name has been tagged as part of an investigation," the supervisor stated robotically. "You can't return to the United States until this is cleared up, and that will take up to a month."

The blood drained from my body. *This cannot be happening!*

Richie collapsed to the ground. At first I thought he'd fainted, but he had dropped to his knees in prayer in front of two hundred people. Yes, he's a very caring caregiver. He raised his arms and his hands together, asking God for a miracle to get us home.

Everything around me seemed to be in fast-forward and slow motion at the same time. As my head whirled, the embassy official added that my name probably was flagged because I travel so much around the world.

Did they suspect me of being an international terrorist? an arms dealer with no arms? Honest, I hadn't laid a hand on anyone. (See what happens when I'm nervous? Make me stop!)

"Come on, seriously, how dangerous could I be?" I asked the embassy official. "I'm meeting with Mexico's president and his wife at the presidential house tomorrow for a Three Kings Day party, so obviously *they* don't see me as a threat."

The US official was not moved. "I don't care if you're meeting with President Obama, you aren't reentering the United States until this investigation is completed," he said.

The situation might have been funny if my schedule hadn't been

packed with a long list of speaking engagements back in the good old US of A. I had to get home.

I was not about to sit around and wait for someone to decide that Americans were safe with Nick in the house. I pleaded with the embassy official for several more minutes, explaining my obligations, dropping the names of important people, stressing that I had employees who counted on me and orphans who looked up to me.

He checked with someone higher in rank on the phone. “All they can do is try to expedite the process. It will still take at least two weeks,” he said.

I probably had a dozen appearances scheduled for those two weeks. But the embassy official was not sympathetic. All we could do at that point was return to our hotel, where I frantically began calling everyone I knew for help and prayers.

I was tapping into the power of faith in action.

To simply say “I believe” in something is not enough. If you want to have an impact in this world, you must put your beliefs and your faith into action. In this case I tapped into my belief in the power of prayer. I called our team at my nonprofit organization, Life Without Limbs (LWL), in California and asked them to start a prayer chain. “We’re moving up the chain of command—way up!” I told them.

The staff at LWL made a flurry of phone calls and sent out a flood of e-mails, tweets, and text messages. Within an hour, one hundred fifty people were praying for a quick resolution to my visa challenge. I also put out calls to friends and supporters who might have influence, relatives, neighbors, or former classmates in the US State Department.

Three hours later, someone from the embassy in Mexico called me. “I can’t believe this, but you’ve been cleared,” the official said. “The

investigation is over. You can come pick up your renewed US visa tomorrow morning.”

That, my friends, is the power of faith in action! It can move mountains, and it can move Nick out of Mexico too.

ACTING IN FAITH

In my travels around the world, people faced with challenges ask me for my advice and my prayers. Often, they know what they need to do, but they are afraid to make a change or to take the first step by asking for help or trusting in God. You, too, may be facing challenges that have you feeling helpless, scared, stuck, paralyzed, uncertain, and unable to act. I understand. I've been there. When teens and young adults come to me and tell me they are being bullied, that they feel lost and alone in the world, or that they are scared because of disabilities, illness, or self-destructive thoughts, I know exactly where they are coming from.

My physical challenges are easy to see, yet people only have to talk to me or hear me speak for a few minutes to understand how much joy I have in spite of that. So they often ask me how I stay positive and where I find the strength to overcome my disabilities. My answer, always, is, “I pray for God’s help, and then I put my faith in action.” I have faith. I believe in certain things that I have no tangible proof of—things I cannot see, taste, touch, smell, or hear. Most of all, I have faith in God. Though I can’t see or touch Him, I believe He created me for a purpose, and I believe that when I put my faith and my beliefs into action, I put myself in a position for God’s blessings.

Will I always get what *I* want? No! But I will always get what *God* wants. The same is true for you. Whether you are a Christian or not, you

must never think that simply believing in something is enough. You can believe in your dreams, but you have to take action to make them happen. You can believe in your talents and have faith in your abilities, but if you don't develop them and put them to use, what good are they? You can believe that you are a good and caring person, but if you don't treat others with goodness and care, where is the proof?

You have a choice. You can believe or not believe. But *if* you believe—*whatever* you believe—you must act upon it. Otherwise, why believe? You may have had challenges in your career, your relationships, or your health. Maybe you have been mistreated, abused, or discriminated against. All those things that have happened *to* you do define you or your life *if* you fail to take action to define yourself. You can believe in your talents. You can believe that you have love to give. You can believe that you can overcome your illness or disability. But that belief on its own won't bring positive change in your life.

You must put it into action.

If you believe you can change your life for the better or make a positive mark in your town or your state or your world, act upon those beliefs. If you think you have a great idea for starting your own business, you must invest your time, money, and talents and make that business happen. Otherwise, what good is just having the idea? If you have identified someone whom you'd like to spend the rest of your life with, why not act upon that belief? What have you got to lose?

FAITH IN ACTION REWARDED

Having faith, beliefs, and convictions is a great thing, but your life is measured by the actions you take based upon them. You can build a great life

around those things you believe and have faith in. I've built mine around my belief that I can inspire and bring hope to people facing challenges in their lives. That belief is rooted in my faith in God. I have faith that He put me on this earth to love, inspire, and encourage others and especially to help all who are willing to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. I believe that I can never earn my way to heaven, and by faith I accept the gift of the forgiveness of sins through Christ Jesus. However, there's so much more than just "getting in" through the Pearly Gates. It is also about seeing others changed by the power of His Holy Spirit, having a close relationship with Jesus Christ throughout this life, and then being further rewarded in heaven.

God did not make me without arms or legs to punish me. I know that now. I have come to realize that this "disability" would actually heighten my ability to serve His purpose as a speaker and evangelist. You might be tempted to think that I'm making a huge leap of faith to feel that way, since most people consider my lack of limbs a huge handicap. Instead, God has used my lack of limbs to draw people to me, especially others with disabilities, so I can inspire and encourage them with my messages of faith, hope, and love.

In the Bible, James said that our actions, not our words, are the proof of our faith. He wrote in James 2:18, "Now someone may argue, 'Some people have faith; others have good deeds.' But I say, 'How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.'"

I've heard it said that our *actions* are to our faith and beliefs as our *bodies* are to our spirits. Your body is the housing of your spirit, the evidence of its existence. In the same way, your actions are the evidence of your faith and beliefs. You have no doubt heard the term "walking the

talk.” Your family, friends, teachers, bosses, coworkers, customers, and clients all expect you to act and live in alignment with the beliefs and convictions that you claim to have. If you don’t, they will call you out, won’t they?

Our peers judge us not by what we say but by what we do. If you claim to be a good wife and mother, then you sometimes will have to put your family’s interests above your own. If you believe your purpose is to share your artistic talents with the world, then you will be judged on the works you produce, not on those you merely propose. You have to walk the talk; otherwise you have no credibility with others—or with yourself—because you, too, should demand that your actions match your words. If they don’t, you will never live in harmony and fulfillment.

As a Christian, I believe the final judge of how we’ve lived is God. The Bible teaches that His judgment is based on our actions, not our words. Revelation 20:12 says: “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, *according to their works*.” I act upon my beliefs by traveling the world and encouraging people to love one another and to love God. I am fulfilled in that purpose. I truly believe it is why I was created. When you act upon your beliefs and put your faith into action, you, too, will experience fulfillment. And please, do not be discouraged if you aren’t always absolutely confident in your purpose and how to act upon it. I have struggled. I still struggle. And so will you. I fail and am far from perfect. But deeds are merely the fruit—the result of the depth of a true conviction of the truth. Truth is what sets us free, not purpose. I found my purpose because I was looking for truth.

It is hard to find purpose or good in difficult circumstances, but that is

the journey. Why did it have to be a journey? Why couldn't a helicopter just pick you up and carry you to the finish line? Because throughout the difficult times, you will learn more, grow more in faith, love God more, and love your neighbor more. It is the journey of faith that begins in love and ends in love.

Frederick Douglass, the American slave turned social activist, said, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." Your character is formed by the challenges you face and overcome. Your courage grows when you face your fears. Your strength and your faith are built as they are tested in your life experiences.

MY FAITH IN ACTION

I have discovered time and again that when we ask for God's help and then take action, knowing in our hearts that He is watching over us, there is no reason to be fearful. My parents taught me this, mostly in the way they lived each day. They are the greatest examples of faith in action I have witnessed.

Though I arrived on this earth missing, as my mother says, "a few bits and pieces," I am blessed in many, many ways. My parents have always been there for me. They did not coddle me. They disciplined me when I needed it and gave me room to make my own mistakes. Most of all, they are wonderful role models.

I was their first child and definitely a surprise package. Despite doing all the usual maternity tests, my mother's doctor detected no indication that I would come into the world with neither arms nor legs. My mother was an experienced nurse who had assisted in hundreds of deliveries, so she took every precaution during her pregnancy.

Needless to say, she and my father were quite stunned that I arrived without limbs. They are devout Christians. In fact, my father was a lay pastor. My parents prayed for guidance while I underwent many days of testing after my birth.

Like all babies, I did not come with an instruction book, but my parents sure would have welcomed a little guidance. They knew of no other parents who'd raised a child without limbs in a world designed for people with a complete set.

They were distraught at first, as any parents would be. Anger, guilt, fear, depression, despair—their emotions ran away with them for the first week or so. Many tears were shed. They grieved for the perfectly formed child they'd envisioned but did not receive. They grieved, too, because they feared that my life would be very difficult.

My parents could not imagine what plan God had in mind for such a boy. Yet, once they'd recovered from their initial shock, they decided to put their trust in God and then to put their faith in action. They gave up their attempts to understand why God had given them such a child. Instead, they surrendered to His plan, whatever it might be, and then went about raising me as best they could, the only way they could: pouring into me all their love one day at a time.

CUSTOM MADE FOR A PURPOSE

When my parents exhausted all the medical resources in Australia, they sought help for me in Canada and the United States and anywhere else in the world that offered hope and information. They never did uncover a full medical explanation for my condition, though many theories were offered. My brother, Aaron, and sister, Michelle, were born a few years later with

the standard package of limbs, so a genetic defect did not appear to be the problem.

After a while, the *why* of my creation became far less important to my parents than the *how* of my survival. How would this boy learn to be mobile without legs? How would he care for himself? How would he go to school? How would he ever support himself as an adult? None of this concerned little baby me, of course. I had no idea that my body wasn't the standard issue. I thought people stared at me because I was so adorable. I also believed I was indestructible and unstoppable. My poor parents could hardly contain their fears as I routinely flung myself like a human beanbag off the couch and onto the floor, over car seats, and around the yard.

You can imagine their concern when they first caught me skateboarding down a steep hill. *Look, Mom, no hands!* Despite their loving efforts to provide me with wheelchairs and other apparatus, I stubbornly developed my own approaches to mobility. The skin on my forehead grew as thick as the soles of most feet because I insisted on raising myself from a prone position by bracing it against walls, furniture, or any other stationary object, and then slowly wriggling my way upright.

To the horror of many innocent bystanders, I also tended to plunge into swimming pools and lakes after I discovered I could swim and remain buoyant by keeping a bit of air in my lungs while paddling about with my little foot. That handy little appendage would prove to be invaluable after an operation was done to separate two fused toes, allowing me to manipulate them with surprising dexterity. With the arrival of cell phones and notebook computers, I could use my foot to type and text, which also proved to be a blessing.

I eventually learned to focus on solutions rather than problems, on

doing instead of stewing. I found that when I got rolling on something, there was a snowball effect. My momentum picked up and my problem-solving powers increased. It's said that the universe rewards action, and that certainly has been true for me.

Day by day, God has revealed His plans for me. Your fears and concerns will be diminished too, if you turn them over to Him and act in faith, working on solutions, building momentum, and trusting that God will show you the path.

You will still face challenges and frustrations. They are part of life. Yet when you put your faith in action, you tend to be unstoppable, seeing obstacles as opportunities to learn and grow. Honestly, I may not always welcome challenges. Sometimes when they occur, I want to ask God, "Haven't You given me enough to deal with?" But time and again, I've been able to apply what I've learned and come out the better for the experience, as difficult as it may have been.

I have had so many of these learning opportunities I should be master of the universe by now. As you might imagine, my greatest hurdles came in adolescence, the time in life when we are all trying to figure out who we are and how we fit in—or don't fit in.

Even though I had many friends and was popular in school, there were bullies who tormented me. More than once, cruel comments were thrown my way. Despite my naturally optimistic and determined spirit, I became increasingly aware that I would never look like everyone else, nor would I be able to do all the things that normally configured people can do.

As much as I tried to make jokes about my lack of limbs, I was increasingly tormented by the thought that I would be a burden on those who loved me, because I wouldn't be able to support myself. My other great fear was that I would never be able to marry and have my own family, because

no woman would want a husband who couldn't hug her, protect her, or hold their children.

In those adolescent years, I fretted constantly and my thoughts turned dark. I could not imagine why God would create me to suffer such deprivation and loneliness. I wondered if He was punishing me or if He was even aware of me. *Was I a mistake? How can a God who loves all His children be so cruel?*

Between the ages of eight and ten, those darkening thoughts triggered despair and destructive impulses. I began contemplating suicide. I'd find myself plotting to leap off a high ledge or to drown myself in the bathtub, where my parents had no fear of leaving me since I had learned to swim.

Finally, I did make an attempt at suicide in the bathtub when I was ten years old. I tried a couple of times to roll and hold my face under water, but I could not go through with it. I kept thinking of the grief and guilt that would burden my parents for the rest of their lives if I took my own life. I could not do that to them.

At that lowest point I couldn't see that my life had a purpose. If I couldn't support myself and wasn't worthy of love from a woman, what good was I? My fear was that I'd float through life, alone and a burden on my family. My youthful despair was rooted in a lack of faith in myself, in my purpose, and in my Creator. I could not see my path, and so I did not believe it was possible for me to have a purposeful and fulfilling life. Because God had not granted my request for a miracle that would give me arms and legs, I lost faith in Him too.

You may have had a similar experience. Maybe you are dealing with a challenge right now. If so, please understand just how wrong I was and how limited my vision had become because of my loss of faith. I forgot that God does not make mistakes, and He always has a plan for us.

In the years that followed, His plan was slowly revealed to me, and my

life unfolded in ways I never dared to dream. My parents encouraged me to reach out to my fellow students and to trust that most would accept me. When I did that, I discovered they were actually inspired by my stories of overcoming my disability. Some even thought I was funny! Their acceptance motivated me to speak to student organizations and church groups. The positive response to my speeches opened my eyes. Over time I realized that one of my purposes was to inspire people to overcome their own challenges and to bring them closer to God, if they were willing.

I came to believe in my own value. My faith in God grew stronger and stronger the more I acted upon it. When I put faith into action and embarked on a career as an international speaker and evangelist, I was rewarded with a joyful and incredibly rewarding life that has taken me around the world, introduced me to millions of people and now *you!*

NO PROOF REQUIRED

You and I cannot see what God has in store for us. That is why you should never believe that your worst fears are your fate or that when you are down, you will never rise again. You must have faith in yourself, in your purpose, and in God's plan for your life. Then you must put fears and insecurities aside and trust that you will find your way. You may not have a clue of what lies ahead, but it's better to act on life than simply let life act on you.

If you have faith, you don't need proof—you live it. You don't need to have all the right answers, just the right questions. No one knows what the future holds. Most of the time, God's plan is beyond our grasp and often beyond even the reach of our imaginations. As a ten-year-old boy, I never would have believed that within the next ten years, God would send me to travel the world to speak to millions of people, inspiring them and leading them to Jesus Christ. Nor could I ever have known that the love of my

family would one day be matched and even surpassed by the love of the intelligent, spiritual, fearless, and beautiful young woman who recently became my wife. That boy who despaired at the thought of his future is at peace today as a man. I know who I am, and I take one step at a time, knowing God is on my side. My life is overflowing with purpose and love. Are my days free of worry? Is every day blessed with sunshine and flowers? No, we all know life doesn't work that way. But I thank God for each and every moment that He allows me to walk the path He has set out for me. You and I are here for a purpose. I've found mine, and you should take my story as an assurance that your path awaits you too.

BELIEVING AND ACHIEVING

When you accept on faith that you will find your purpose and then move step by step on the path to discovery, you will find as I have that God's vision of your life is far greater than anything you might imagine. For example, I may never receive the miracle of arms and legs, but I have seen many times that I can be a miracle for someone else. Through my experiences, including the despair that led to my suicide attempt, I can relate to the struggles of others.

I can be the miracle that opens your eyes, inspires you, instills courage in heart, assures you that you are loved, and sends you forward to serve your purpose.

LOVE DRIVES FAITH INTO ACTION

Faith in action comes down to love. I love you so much that I care enough about you to serve you and help you and lend an ear, to inspire you and

encourage you. It always comes back to love. We have the power to love without limits, and we need to activate that love, not just to fulfill our purpose, but to play a part in seeing the whole world come to a peace and fulfillment in life. If your journey starts and ends in love, I want to be a part of the God-given love to carry you through.

The apostle Paul said, “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal... If I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

In a world that can often seem callous and cruel, we tend to lose sight of the fact that God loves us. He sent His Son to pay the price and die for us. He is always there for us. When you know the strength of God, all you want to do is love Him and all those around you. You may forget that sometimes. I know I have. Yet I’ve found that when I’m most confused about God’s plan for me, when I’m seriously struggling to figure out what I should do to serve His purpose, He will place someone in my path or create a situation to reveal that purpose or to test whether I walk the talk. My experience with Felipe Camiroaga is one of the most recent and compelling examples of this.

For many years Felipe was the cohost of a television talk show in Chile that is as popular as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* was in the United States. He and Katherine Salosny hosted Chile’s longest-running talk show, *Buenos Dias a Todos*, which translates to “Good Morning, Everyone.” The show is the highest rated of all those broadcast on TVN, Chile’s state-owned television network. I was invited to appear on that show during my second visit to Chile in September 2011. The interview was supposed to last twenty minutes, which is long for a guest spot, especially when a translator is needed. Yet my visit with Felipe and Katherine went on for forty minutes,

which is almost unheard of on such a show. Even better, from my perspective, was the fact that my hosts allowed me to speak at length about what my faith means to me and how I put that faith into action by traveling around the world as an evangelist and inspirational speaker. Felipe seemed intently interested in my message, which surprised me.

I did not know him well, but I was aware of his reputation as perhaps Chile's most high-profile bachelor—a man whose love life had long been the subject of much interest in the media. Many people seemed to think of Felipe merely as a celebrity, but during our interview he asked serious questions about spiritual matters.

He asked me, for example, how I came to know God. I said it requires faith, which is the act of believing in something of which there is no physical proof. I spoke of my faith that Jesus is the path to heaven and eternal life. I also confessed to Katherine and Felipe and their television audience that I am a greedy person: ninety years on this earth is not long enough for me; I want to live forever in heaven. “But there is one thing better than going to heaven and that is to encourage at least one other person to go with me,” I said. “That is why I have strength. I keep a pair of shoes in my closet because I believe in miracles, but there is no greater miracle than seeing someone come to God. So pray for faith, and God will help you one day at a time.”

As I spoke, a wave of gratitude washed over me. I was grateful for being able to express my faith so openly and at such length on Felipe's television show. I also noticed that Felipe seemed to be emotionally affected by my words. Tears welled up in his eyes. Katherine also seemed to be listening intently.

I'm an evangelist, so naturally I took their interest as license to keep talking. When they asked if there were limits to my faith, I responded that

while I cannot say everything is possible, “There are no limits to the joy and peace within me, no matter what happens to me.” I wish I could tell people that if they love God, everything will be okay. The truth is that people still suffer. They endure sickness, financial problems, broken relationships, and the loss of loved ones. Tragedies occur in every life, and I believe we are meant to learn from them. My hope is that when people who are in pain see that I have a joyful life, they will think, *If Nick—without arms and legs—is thankful, then I will be thankful for today, and I will do my best.*

I shared with Katherine and Felipe that I’d been through a rough patch a few months earlier (which I will write more about later). “I always know God is there, but He confuses me still at times. It is hard when you go through a valley. Just remember, ‘I’m going to learn something in this valley that I would not have otherwise learned, and I am who I am today because of what I have been through,’” I told them.

You, too, may have felt overwhelmed by events and confused about how something could possibly be part of God’s plan for you. Know that, as I said that day to my television hosts, it’s possible to get through even the darkest times by walking in faith one step at a time, knowing that every day, every breath, and every moment is a gift from God, being thankful all the time to Him. “The biggest danger is thinking you don’t need God,” I said.

All the time I was speaking, I kept marveling at the fact that no one was signaling for my hosts to cut me off, thank me, and send me packing. At one point Felipe brought out a soccer ball and asked me to demonstrate my world-class soccer skills, which, you can imagine, are pretty much limited to head shots and small chips.

To my amazement, they also played my entire music video, which had just been released. Finally, when it came time to end the show, I was so

grateful for all they'd given me that I spent five minutes thanking Felipe and Katherine and all their viewers. Then I prayed for them and asked the Holy Spirit to come down, touch their hearts, and give them strength, peace, and the comfort to know that God loves them, has a plan for them, and will always be with them. I also asked Jesus to help us all have faith to believe in Him.

Again, I kept waiting for someone to come on the set with a hook to yank me offstage, but that never happened. Seriously, I was granted so much airtime that day I began to wonder if my parents, cousins, and other big supporters had secretly invaded the studio, commandeered the director's chair, and taken control of the cameras. Later, I would learn that the show's director was a strong Christian and a big fan, and he'd told his crew to just keep rolling. The director was in tears afterward, and he thanked me warmly. They told us that they've never had such a positive immediate feedback of calls, thanking TVN for letting me share my story.

GUIDED BY FAITH

My appearance on the morning show with Felipe and Katherine was such a great experience I was still riding high that afternoon when we returned to our hotel. I was wound up, so I turned on some music while casually surfing the Internet. Then the hotel phone rang. It was my interpreter from the show. She said there'd been an accident and I should check the television news right away. An urgent news flash came on, and they showed a photograph of Felipe and a plane crash site. I understand enough Spanish to pick up on the fact that the crash had been on a remote island, and to my horror, Felipe was one of the twenty-one passengers on board, along with several other TVN employees.

Search-and-rescue teams had been dispatched. The crash occurred off the Juan Fernández Islands, hundreds of miles offshore, so reports were sketchy. No one yet knew if there were survivors. Felipe was among five TVN employees who'd gone to the island to tape a segment on the rebuilding efforts there since an earthquake and tsunami wiped out the island's main town in February 2010. The news reporters said the Chilean Air Force plane they were aboard had made two attempts to land in bad weather before crashing. Luggage and other debris had been found in the ocean, near the island's landing strip.

As I watched the broadcast about the crash and the search-and-rescue efforts, I felt sick. I had only known Felipe a few hours, yet I could tell he was impacted by our discussion of faith. He seemed genuinely moved when I talked about being greedy for more than a long life on this earth and my desire for eternal life with God. The nature of his questions and the intent look on his face, as well as his emotional response, gave me the sense that this man was searching for a way into a more spiritual life. All I could think about was Felipe and the others on that plane and the suffering of their families and loved ones. I prayed and prayed for them. It was difficult to focus on anything else, but I had been scheduled months earlier to speak the next night to five thousand people, so I had to do some preparation for that, despite the unfolding tragedy.

The media labeled my appearance on his show as Felipe's "last interview," and all the stations were replaying it when not broadcasting the grim reports of the search-and-rescue operation. The hours dragged by without word of survivors. First they found only debris, and then we learned of bodies being discovered one by one but not identified.

Later that afternoon an executive from TVN contacted me and asked if I would come back to the station to lead a live broadcast prayer for those

in the crash and their families, friends, and coworkers. I agreed but wondered how I could offer hope to them and also leave room for mourning. We still had not heard if anyone had survived or even if all the passengers had been accounted for. In the televised prayer session on TVN, I noted that when I'd first seen news of the crash, I told someone, "Thank God there is heaven." I had felt sorrow for those who may have died or suffered in the crash, but I took comfort in the belief they would find peace and God's love in the next life. "Heaven is real and God is real, so we have to make sure our walk with Him is real," I said in my message. "We will get through in the same way my parents taught me to live: one day at a time with Christ by our side."

HIS PLAN REVEALED

When I completed my spot for the cameras, TVN executives asked me to address their staff of nearly three hundred people. I had to summon all my willpower to compose myself in front of the grieving group who feared they'd lost their coworkers in the crash. I was overcome with emotion too, especially when the woman who had served as my translator on Felipe and Katherine's show came and hugged me, crying. She had considered Felipe a role model whom she admired greatly, and she was very distraught.

After I consoled and prayed with her, a TVN director pulled me aside. "Nick, I want you to know what happened with Felipe after your show yesterday," he said. I was thrown off at first because he seemed almost upbeat in such a somber setting, but when he told me his story, I understood his feelings of joy. This was the same Christian gentleman who'd directed my segment the day before and let my interview go on twice as long as

scheduled. He told me that my reading of Felipe that day had been accurate. The television personality had been on a spiritual quest for a long time, trying to find his way to God.

The director said he had often discussed matters of faith with Felipe, in hopes of bringing him to the Lord. Felipe had been growing closer and closer to accepting Jesus into his heart, but he had not yet made the commitment. The director had long ago told Felipe that one day he hoped to become a full-time preacher so he could minister to needy people in Chile. After my appearance on the show, Felipe said that he could finally see the value in that career change.

The director said I might have helped Felipe move a step closer to God just hours before the plane accident. Upon hearing that, I thanked God once again for revealing His plan for me. It is humbling to think that I could be a tool in His hands used to benefit others.

OPPORTUNITIES TAKEN

Later that night, as I was just a few minutes into a speech to five thousand people at Movistar Arena in Santiago, a young woman walked on stage and whispered into my ear that the government had officially announced that the crew and all twenty-one passengers aboard Felipe's airplane had died in the crash.

Times like this can strike us as so unfair. When sent reeling by the death of a friend or loved one, by sickness, broken relationships, or financial crises, you should not blame God. Instead, choose to have faith. Know that He will soothe you with joy, peace, strength, and love.

I mourned the loss of lives, and my heart went out to the families of those killed in the crash. Yet I was grateful that my testimony and response

to Felipe's questions during our interview might have helped take Felipe a few steps closer on his path to eternal salvation.

After learning that there were no survivors in the plane crash, I paused briefly, and then shared the news with my audience. Men and women consoled one another. Many sobbed quietly into the shoulders of those next to them. I asked everyone to join me in a prayer for the victims' families and friends, for the people at TVN, and all of Chile, which in recent years had experienced this plane crash, earthquakes, and the mine collapse that had trapped thirty-three miners during my first visit to this beautiful country just a year before. I then recounted for my audience the wonderful interview I'd had with Felipe and Katherine just the day before. I told them how generous they were to extend the interview from twenty minutes to forty. And I shared this thought: "I did not know that the first time I met Felipe would be the last."

That is truly a bittersweet thought. Bitter because Felipe and I had made a connection that day and I looked forward to discussing with him my faith in greater depth someday. Now I will not have that opportunity. Yet the sweetness lies in the fact that I did not miss the most important opportunity with Felipe. I am a man of faith, and I acted upon that faith by proclaiming it and sharing my beliefs with Felipe when he inquired. I did not hesitate. I believe my purpose is to bring as many souls to God as I possibly can, and so I acted upon that purpose.

I regret that Felipe and the others aboard that plane are no longer with us, but I have no regrets about my interaction with my television host. In fact, I feel blessed that God allowed me to share my faith.

You should never miss an opportunity to act upon your faith or beliefs because you could be the last person to influence someone, to give him courage, or to inspire him. None of us know when our own time will come

to move from this life to the next. That is why you should define your purpose in life. Decide what you know based on facts as well as what you believe based on faith. Then take action to fulfill your purpose according to those convictions. You will never regret living that way.

I put faith and my beliefs out there for Felipe and Katherine and their millions of viewers. I shared with them exactly how I felt and why I felt that way. I admitted that I was not always strong, that I have occasional doubts, and sometimes I am confused. My faith is strong, and it is sometimes hard to see clearly how everything has perfect purpose. But to embrace the journey and believe you are not alone through it is what I try to inspire in others.

I have no regrets about opening up and proclaiming my faith. In whatever purpose you hope to serve, you should do the same. When you put your faith and beliefs into action, you will discover the life for which you were created.