

Introduction

As I was sitting at Gate 21 in the San Diego International Airport very early one morning, I looked through the glass wall at the United Airlines plane that would hopefully take me home to Denver. My wife, Nan, and I had been visiting my aunt in Carlsbad for a couple of weeks, and I needed to get back before she did for some meetings. I was on the standby list for the flight, so my thoughts were a little anxious as I wondered if I would get a seat.

I had just taken out my daily devotional book and my journal and started to spend a short “quiet” time reading and praying.

Suddenly, a booming noise erupted from about 20 feet behind me at the gate. Given the state of our world today, my first thought was of a gunshot or some type of explosion. But the noise did not sound like either. It sounded like someone had dropped a bowling ball on the floor from about six feet high. The sound was so loud that it shook me up a bit.

I quickly turned around to look in the direction of the unexpected noise behind me. As I stood up to see the situation better, I noticed a woman lying face down on the floor. She was probably in her late 40s or early 50s, and I had briefly noticed her sitting there reading a book when I first arrived at the gate.

So, what had happened? I feared it was not good — horrible, actually. And I was right. Apparently, as eyewitnesses sitting near her told me, she started having a massive seizure, but it was unclear whether it was due to a heart attack or a stroke. In severe pain, the lady tried to stand up from her seat, and as she did, she fell straight over with her face and head hitting the carpeted concrete floor with a forceful thud. It was not a bowling ball hitting the floor — it was her head.

Several people nearby came to her aid, and someone yelled to call 911. A doctor was in the gate area and he pushed his way through the crowd of people to get to the lady. He immediately rolled her over on her back, checked for signs of a pulse and breathing, and then started CPR. She was not responding, and things were not looking good from what I could see.

You know how when something like this or an accident happens to you or around you, it seems like it either happened in a flash or that it takes an eternity? For me that morning, it was as if everything was in slow motion. I could imagine this lady in pain, trying to stand up and then falling forward and slamming her face into the carpet-covered concrete floor. But there was nothing going on in slow motion as I heard this loud thud when she landed. The sound still haunts me now, even after several years.

But let's get back to the story: It seemed to me like the paramedics and emergency personnel were taking forever to arrive on the scene. Various people continued to give her CPR without interruption — but to no avail. Finally, emergency vehicles pulled up right by the plane outside of our

gate and made their way up the steps to the concourse. In retrospect, probably only 10 to 12 minutes transpired from the time of the call to their arrival, but it really seemed like a long time.

The paramedics quickly started an IV and did all the other things you've seen a hundred times on TV. After a couple of minutes, they prepared the stretcher to transport the lady to the hospital. By this time, even from where I was standing about 20 feet away, I could tell that her face was beginning to turn blue.

Why am I beginning this book with such a horrific tragedy? It was a shocking and sobering event for me and for all the people at the gate. First of all, that incident or something just as awful could happen to any of us — at any moment — without warning. The second reason that this incident had such a profound impact on me is that it had only been slightly over a year since I had undergone emergency open-heart surgery. What just happened at Gate 21 could easily have happened to me. But thankfully, my wife was a lioness with my cardiologist to do further testing (after I had shortness of breath running between gates at the LAX airport), but I passed my stress test with flying colors. She told the doctor that she did not care what the results showed, asserting there was something seriously wrong with me, and she had been trying to convince him for over a year that I was not OK.

I was blessed by God to allow my heart problem to be found and corrected before serious damage or a fatal event occurred. This lady, however, was just sitting at the airport, reading a book and planning to fly to Denver in a short

time. I don't know if she was going home to Denver, going to see family there, taking a vacation, or transferring to another destination at the Denver airport. Who knows? But one thing is fairly certain: She was not expecting to die that morning. She had plans for the day and for many days in the future. And what if she was flying to see her grandchildren or family in Denver? Can you imagine their reaction to a phone call while waiting at the airport to pick up their loved one — that she would not be coming today, and further, that they would never see her alive again on earth? How do you explain that to young grandchildren?

So many things were running through my mind at the moment, and the truth is that I don't know the outcome. I was praying, and I'm sure many others nearby were also praying. So maybe God spared her life and she made a complete recovery and is again enjoying her time with family and friends. I would not want to wager a cup of coffee on it though (especially one of those \$6 fancy lattes at Starbucks).

As this tragic scene was nearing its end, a businessman was just arriving at the gate and walked up next to me. Likely in his late 50s or early 60s, he was carrying a backpack with the IBM logo on it. "What's going on?", the man asked me, while he stretched to see over the crowd.

I briefly explained what had happened. Then he said, "Wow, that's really awful!"

The Holy Spirit prompted me to say something. "Yes, it might be really awful," I replied, "but it all depends on what you believe about where you're going when you die. I for one believe that I'll spend eternity in Heaven with Jesus, and so

it won't be awful. It will be fantastic when I die!"

The Holy Spirit prompted me again. "Do you know where you're going?"

His face showed a bit of surprise at my question, but then he said, "Well, I hope so."

I took that response to mean that he thinks he's a pretty good person and he's done some good things in his life, so he hopes it will be good enough for God to let him through the Pearly Gates. But it's my belief that unless you have accepted the free gift of salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ on the Cross, all the good works in the world are not going to be enough.

As the crowd now started to disperse and the businessman was about to walk away, I said to him, "If you're not certain where you're going when you die, you should give some serious thought to Jesus and His forgiveness of sin." He turned to leave, and I added, "Safe travels. Hope to see you again." He turned his head back and said, "Thanks. Take care."

I want to point out a very basic but important aspect of **As You Go**. When the man first came up beside me and spoke, I chose to engage him in conversation. I immediately started to pray for God to lead me through this encounter with the right words and attitude. After I briefly explained what had happened and he said how awful it was, I could have just grunted the word "yeah", and that would have been it.

But I sensed that God wanted me to step out in faith, seize this opportunity that He was orchestrating, and engage in conversation. So I boldly said what I did.

Many Christians would be asking me why I didn't tell

him the whole story. Why didn't I make sure that he understood that doing some good works was not going to get him to Heaven and that if he didn't repent and accept Jesus that he was going to spend eternity in Hell with the Devil and all the other evil people? Why didn't I even take a gentler approach and at least explain the whole Gospel message to him and try to close the deal? You know: Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died and was buried, and then was resurrected on the third day.

The main reason I didn't do that is because God didn't tell me to. I had a brief encounter with this guy, and God wanted me to plant a seed, to speak up and say something that just might move him one tiny step closer to Jesus — or eventually lead him to take the plunge and give his life to Christ.

Apparently, this was not the right time and place for anything more to happen than what happened. I did the part God asked me to do in that three-minute encounter with the IBM guy, and the rest is between him and God. As we walked away, I prayed that God would use the seed I cast to open his heart and mind to receive Jesus. And then I was on my way, alert and willing to experience the next engagement that God had for me.

That's what "As You Go" is all about.

As you start reading the chapters ahead, it is my hope and prayer that you will not expect to read more gloom and doom. But that you will consider the stories you read and the information you learn as a wonderful opportunity to invite more people all around you — family and friends and coworkers and strangers — to join you in making the most

important decision of their lives: where their souls will spend eternity.

It's not that life's so short; it's that eternity is so long. My hope is that, just as it was for me, this story will serve as a wakeup call — that life is to be lived to the fullest and the Gospel will be shared intentionally and relentlessly with the enthusiasm and urgency that it deserves. I realize that the word “Gospel” means “Good News”, but I never could understand why the message of salvation is ***only*** called the “Good News”. ***It's the GREATEST NEWS ever!***