



**T**o most of the congregation, December 9, 2007 was a Sunday like any other, except for the fact that Jack Hayford was scheduled to speak instead of the senior pastor. Oddly, attendance was down for the normally 10,000-member-plus-megachurch, but well-known author and preacher Hayford gave his anointed message to the many who still came. In retrospect, his message about the need for a soft heart of forgiveness seems almost a foreshadowing of the harrowing events that would soon take place.

People were filing out after the service to head home for Sunday meals and well-deserved naps while people like my parents meandered to the bookstore in the main lobby to buy a book. Some friends of theirs were at the bookstore at the same time, but amid all of the people and the several shelves likely blocking their faces, they didn't see one another. So my parents made their way out to their SUV.

Only six minutes after they purchased my book, as evidenced now by the bookstore receipt, a troubled 24-year-old, weighed down with an assault rifle, two handguns, and a 1000 rounds of ammunition, fired his first shot in an effort to somehow ease the bitterness he felt toward all Christians. Matthew J. Murray was his name, and he wanted nothing more than to destroy the community that he felt had treated him unfairly. Youth With A Mission (YWAM) had previously decided he was unfit to be a part of their young missionary program. For whatever reason, potentially medically related, the leadership did not allow him to participate in their training. Perhaps because of that rejection, deep-seated anger and resentment built up in this young man, and it eventually erupted in not just one, but two separate shootings-both occurring on the same day. The first of his tirades occurred in the morning hours at a YWAM in Arvada, Colorado, where he shot two staff members and injured two more.

Then Murray decided, for whatever reason, that shooting spree wasn't enough. He was still bloodthirsty, and his next stop was around 1:00 in the afternoon at New Life Church, where he was determined to kill the first churchgoers he saw. He wounded a few people, one of them being David Works, the father of the two teenage girls who would soon die. Truly, their deaths were the deaths of martyrs, and they should be recorded along with all the other saints of history who have given their lives for Christ. Most likely coincidentally, but also an important fact to know, one of the two sisters had actually been involved in YWAM missionary work.

At New Life, we have since grieved the losses of the two Works daughters, others who were injured, and those who were emotionally traumatized. We've given money and gift cards to provide for the Works parents and their two other children.

The precious lives of those two girls were no small price to pay, and they will always be remembered as heroes. But as we, the congregants, processed what had actually happened, we came to the startling realization that in a church of thousands we could have lost thousands. He *could have* come a half hour earlier when people were still seated listening to the sermon. He *could have* sprayed his rifle gunfire from the back of the main sanctuary, hitting anyone and everyone in his path in the amphitheater-style room. He *could have* had several other armed people with him at all different parts of the campus in an attempt to pull off a surprise attack, killing all the security guards first. So many more awful, horrific things *could have* happened. But we thank God every day that they didn't.

Thinking back, I believe it was largely the obedience, discipline, and trusting spirit of female security guard Jeanne Assam that prevented this tragedy from being even more horrendous. It was she who faced Matthew head on, after the lobby was evacuated and her fellow church members had run to safety. It was she who saved the lives of many we'll never need to know *would* have been taken. It was she who fought as a modern-day David, and just like David, she was underarmed in the eyes of the world. David had a few pebbles to pitch at a massive warrior over nine feet tall. Jeanne had only one gun to Matthew's three. Yet, David and Jeanne had the most powerful hidden weapon of all—simply God—and in God they had confidence because they knew their strength came from a higher Source.

Neither David nor Jeanne had any intention of running, and neither was wearing armor—that is, the kind you can see, anyway. Though their armor was invisible to the naked eye, it was quite visible to the heavenly being. God has already fastened each piece of their suits in place. David shouted, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Samuel 17:27 NIV). To him, it was simply unacceptable, and there was no question as to whether he would fight the giant, just as there was no question about whether God would defeat the Philistines.

Just as David knew he was destined for great things, having been anointed in 1 Samuel 16 to be the next king of Israel, Jeanne had a sense that God had big plans for her—something significant, something soon. She sought counsel from trusted Christian friends and leaders, and they advised her to fast. It was the third day of her fast, and she was feeling a little weak. In fact, she opted out of working the first service because of her lightheadedness but decided she would work her normal post as security guard for the second service.

Having been trained through the police force awhile back, she knew how to handle such situations. Regardless, it's human to have fear, especially when the attack is so unexpected and undeserved. Jeanne told the media, nevertheless, that she "didn't think for a minute to run away".<sup>1</sup> She knew God was before her and behind her, and when she locked eyes with Murray, she sensed a confirmation that this was the moment God was preparing her for. Because of this, she was calm and focused, able to speak to the gunman and to follow her training. Her hands didn't shake, and she "did what she had to do."

When I think of her now, just as when I think of young David, I ponder invisible armor—the armor of God referred to in Ephesians 6:10-20. It is more potent than any earthly armor that even the best engineers can create. Murray, for instance, was wearing a bulletproof vest, yet he was wounded several times by the ten to twelve rounds fired by Assam. In the end, it was Murray who fired the final blow to himself, and in the end, it was his lack of God's presence and *His* armor that left him hopeless and dying as he sunk against the church wall, bleeding and breathing his last.



Though God may never ask us to engage in such a physical battle, we *will* face spiritual battles every day of our lives; and if we're not properly armed, we will feel the wounds deeply. So the question is how do we arm ourselves properly?

### FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELT!

"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist. . ." (Ephesians 6:14). With this belt, we can decipher lies from the truth of God and His Word. Those who don't have God, and thus suffer without His armor, succumb many times to the lies of the Enemy.

Again, I look at Jeanne as a woman who, through her recent salvation experience, took a hold of the powerful grace of God and, with her newfound friendship, believed the truth she was given. She practiced it, she fasted, she prayed, and sought out that divine friendship. And she was rewarded for fastening her belt. On the other hand, we can only imagine the types of lies running through the mind of Matthew that fateful day. Judging from reports on the news, it sounded like he was believing lies that Satan meant for his harm. And the lies did just that—harmed him fatally! Perhaps all he needed was some medical treatment and a short stay in the hospital. But perhaps, he had willfully succumbed to the Enemy's lies because anger and resentment had so taken over his heart. He desperately needed this belt of truth, and one might wonder how his life and actions would have been different if he'd had it. . .

### PROTECT YOUR HEART!

When Jeanne accepted Christ, she accepted the righteousness of God in place of her sin nature. This righteousness, metaphorically speaking, is like a breastplate, protecting the seat of our emotions, self-worth, and trust—that is, our hearts. If we view these central parts of our being through the lens of God's righteousness, we will live like we know our future is secure. Murray may have had a sturdy bulletproof vest, but unfortunately, Satan's darts had penetrated his heart long before he donned the army attire.

### BEAUTIFUL FEET!

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!' " (Isaiah 52:7). We're also told in Ephesians to fit our feet "with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15). This means we ought to be ready at all times to share the Good News that God has set us free! I think of Jeanne's testimony to the media when asked how she did what she did. Her answer was always, "God."

### SHIELDS OUT!

"In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16). Shields have been used from ancient times through today as a protection to block attacks from enemies. In a spiritual sense, these attacks come in the form of insults, setbacks, and temptations. But with our shields of faith in place, Satan's arrows meant to harm and kill will fall lifelessly to the ground.

### HELMET HEAD!

Satan constantly prompts us to doubt, tempting us to question God and His faithfulness in our lives. With our helmets fastened, however, these doubts are transformed into a bold certainty of our salvation. We know, then, that our salvation is secure and that *nothing* Satan does can separate us from the love of the Father.

## **T**OUCHE!

Finally, “take. . .the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). Interestingly enough, this is the only *offensive* weapon in the whole list of armor; the rest are defensive.

What exactly does “touche” mean, then? According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, it is “used to acknowledge a hit in fencing or the success or appropriateness of an argument, accusation, or a witty point.” Maybe you’re like me, and you can’t help but picture that scene in Disney’s *The Three Musketeers* where all three musketeers—Athos, Porthos, and Aramis—all commit to a duel on the same afternoon with the somewhat over-confident D’Artagnan. As it turned out, though, the three musketeers end up joining forces with D’Artagnan when they learn they have other men to fight who are enemies of all four.

In the same way that Athos, Porthos, and Aramis came to the conclusion that their true enemies were those against the musketeer cause (not D’Artagnan, then, since his dream was to become a musketeer), the Works family chose to consider their true enemy—the Enemy of our souls—instead of the one they could have easily blamed. They could have easily pegged Matthew Murray as the source of their losses, of their pain, of their anger. They could have sat in a chair for days on end mourning their two beautiful girls and telling Good Morning America that Matthew was disturbed, cruel, and deserving of more punishment than his own suicide provided. They could have spoken bitter words and used harsh language to vent the deep pain they will likely feel for years to come. Yet they chose a higher road. They chose to place the blame where blame is due—upon the Christians’ sole Enemy, who after his own fall from the heavenly realms, decided to tempt the human race into their own Fall. Since that Fall in the Garden of Eden, man has succumbed to temptation—from Cain’s murder of his own brother Abel to the shootings at New Life, people have paid the price for those who’ve chosen the wrong road.

In 2008, then, remember that there are two roads. I want to be the traveler who can say, as Robert Frost did in his famous poem “The Road Not Taken,” that “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--/ I took the road less traveled by,/ And that has made all the difference.” It’s harder to put on the armor of God--mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and even sometimes physically--preparing for the plans God has for you than to go unarmed. It’s easier to act like a victim in a cruel world where too many horrible things seem to happen. It’s easier to harbor unforgiveness than to consciously discipline yourself to forgive at all costs because Christ forgave us. But God didn’t call us to the easy life, and there’s a reason His road is the one less traveled.

Keep in mind, though, that it’s also the only one with huge rewards at the end. So armor up, and blessings await you even as you walk the path and run the race. . .



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/14817480/detail.html>

