

LAS VEGAS

FINDING FAITH IN CHRIST AFTER SURVIVING A TRAGIC SHOOTING

Story by Christmas Beeler

Allison Crute sat listening to Pastor Derek Neider's message at Calvary Chapel Las Vegas, her arm in a sling marked "Vegas Strong." It was hard to believe a week ago she and her boyfriend Andrew Kampe had been wounded in the deadliest mass shooting in modern American history. But this morning she was ready to hear from God. Though she grew up in a Christian home, religion wasn't always a top priority for her; instead, she sought to enjoy life—surfing, hiking, becoming a travel nurse. Over the past week, she realized that God had spared her life many times, but the nightmare last Sunday night was the one that finally woke her up.

Pastor Derek read 1 John 4:19, which says, *We love Him because He first loved us.* Derek explained that Jesus is the ultimate first responder: God saw us dying in our sins and threw us a life preserver—His Son. That got Allison and Andrew's attention, as she is a nurse and he had once been a paramedic. Pastor Derek explained, "God has extended His Son to us. All you have to do is take the hand of Jesus Christ, and God will deliver you, rescue you, save you, give you a new life, and restore what's been broken." He described how a drowning man doesn't hesitate to take the life preserver, or ask for a different color or shape.

Allison laughed but thought soberly: *Good point. God has sent me so many signs and messages, and I just didn't want to accept what He was offering me. But am I ready to make another major change in my life right now?* She looked at her left arm. She had been dancing, with her arms over her chest—that's why the bullet heading toward her heart had



Photo by Kathy Morales

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instead hit and shattered the radius bone in her arm. That was the first miracle. She remembered lying on the ground, bleeding badly; as a nurse, she knew her artery had been severed. Andrew threw himself over her body, shielding her, and taking shrapnel in his left arm. *And saving my life,* she thought. Suddenly a man had lifted her, carrying her on his back to a safer spot at the "House of Blues" tent before sprinting back toward the gunfire. Amidst continued gunfire and chaos, a U.S. Army Corpsman had put three tourniquets on her arm and helped Andrew get her into a minivan to rush to a hospital. Someone had tried to pull her out of the van, but the two of them pulled her unconscious body back inside. She saw God's hand in so many ways—even in them choosing a different spot in the crowd that third night of the festival. Everyone who had been where they were standing the night before was now dead. She and Andrew had talked about that, realizing

they were blessed by God to be alive. Maybe that was why Andrew had changed his mind at the last minute and hired a car to get to the church.

Derek urged, "If you realize the brevity of your life, let Him rescue you. If you want to respond to what He's done for you, say 'yes' to Him. Today, you need to know Him." He began to pray. Allison's heart was burning. She knew it was time. She felt Andrew sobbing beside her. They had talked about these very things—mortality, how easily life can end, how God had spared them. When the pastor gave the invitation, Allison and Andrew were the first ones to stand and walk to the front of the church.

"I wish it hadn't taken getting shot to get my attention," Allison recalled. "God saved our lives physically Sunday night at the concert, while more fully, truly, and publicly

saving us the following Sunday at church that morning." She reflected, "Even though I had strayed so far, I realized He was right there with us. And He forgave us; now we're trying to live like He wants us to. Andrew and I pray instead of fight. We've learned we can lean on God instead of fighting or running to a bar." Allison encouraged others, "Don't wait to get shot to realize Jesus is there for you." God has already provided more than \$34,000 through a

Bottom left: Andrew Kampe, left, and Allison Crute are released from the hospital after being shot.

Top right: A memorial honors the victims of the Las Vegas shooting that occurred October 1st.

Inset: A team from CC Lone Mountain, NV, leads worship at the memorial site near the resort where the shootings occurred.



Photo by Nancy Dunning



Photo courtesy CC Las Vegas

GoFundMe page started by Allison's friends for her medical costs.

Andrew remembered how he had felt that Sunday morning: "I was just overwhelmed with thankfulness for God keeping us alive. ... I was feeling sorrow for the mistakes I had made, thankful for our safety, and hope and joy for the good that I did and wanting more of that for us."

God's Presence in Suffering

Pastor Derek commented, "God takes what was meant for evil and turns it around for good." He recounted that many hearts are open to God in the wake of the tragedy. "When people are crying out to Him, that's when the Church needs to be present, to be His hands and feet," he said. "The very thing we want to avoid—pain, crisis—is the place where God is so tangibly. He has divine appointments for us, things He wants us to do in those situations." At about 2 a.m., a few hours after the shooting, Pastor Derek and two other pastors on his staff went down to the Las Vegas Strip to pass out bottled water and pray with people. He added, "We've had some amazing open doors."

CC Las Vegas and other area Calvary Chapels have been visiting survivors and their families in the hospital. "Not one family has said 'no' to receiving prayer. In fact, they call all the family members into the room," Derek said, "There is a hunger for prayer and for God like we've never seen before." At one major hospital, the chief nursing officer gathered a large group of staff together in the ICU and asked Derek to pray.



Photo courtesy CC Las Vegas

"In our city right now there is this web of pain: Everybody knows someone who was hurt or lost someone. But there's also a web of ministry," he said. "For that to happen, we have to go outside the walls of our church. Suffering is not comfortable for anyone ... but we have the answer: Jesus Christ."

A Gentle Approach

Several Calvary Chapel pastors and believers in Las Vegas have received disaster response training from the Billy Graham Rapid Response program. "We learn about three principles: presence, prayer, and share. Just being present with someone in the midst of their tragedy says more to them than a thousand sermons. Sometimes you just listen. Part of the healing process is people being able to weep." When a believer offers to pray, Derek added, "We bring the presence of God into a traumatic situation. ... We invite Him in to do what no one else can do. He can reach right into that person's heart." Thirdly, a believer can share "the hope of what Christ has done for us" with the hurting.

Two young women from Calvary Chapel Aurora, CO, felt God call them to go to Las Vegas and share God's comfort. Mary Pfeifer and Jessica Latta joined Calvary Chapel Lone Mountain, NV, in ministering at the the memorial of 58 wooden crosses—one for each shooting victim—on the Strip. CC Lone Mountain and CC Green Valley, NV, have teamed up to have a constant presence there, ministering to hundreds of people every day who come to the memorial. Jessica recounted, "One guy, William, we offered him water—and that was all it took to start a conversation. He told us about his friend Logan who had called

him [while taking shelter] at the shooting. We asked him if he felt God's protection. ... After two hours, he began bringing God into the conversation more and more. It wasn't even really us ministering to him; it was the Holy Spirit using his own words."

Mary added, "We were just helping him to see how God had been working in his whole life. He felt like he was at a crossroads; we told him that was a good thing because he had the chance to choose Christ. ... Lots of seeds have been planted."

The pair joined some young men from CC Lone Mountain in ministering to an 85-year-old woman whose granddaughter was killed. Jessica hugged her several times as she wept and talked. Jessica recalled, "She said, 'With all the tragedy going on, God is too busy for my worries! We encouraged her that God is not too busy, that He can take care of every one of our needs. She felt guilty for crying so much, and we shared that Jesus had wept too. She told us she could feel His love pouring out from us. God really used that in my life. It's powerful knowing that His Holy Spirit indeed lives inside of me, and people can feel Him.'" Assistant Pastor Rich Purdy of CC Lone Mountain shared the Gospel with the woman, and the team prayed for her.

Being Available

After the shooting, CC Lone Mountain hosted a Billy Graham Rapid Response Training to equip church members to minister to their hurting community; more than 100 attended. "Everyone who comes down [to the Strip] to help is nervous or afraid at first. Then, after about 30 minutes of hanging with us, they peel away from us and go out on their own. It's amazing," Pastor Rich observed. "My natural instinct is to want to talk to everybody, but I have to hold back, be still, and let the Holy Spirit bring people to me. I ask Him to help me look at them through His eyes, say what He would say."

Rich recalled one middle-aged couple who came to the memorial site and shared their story. They had been working at the 3-day concert as porters, taking care of the trash. That day, their work assignment got changed, and they escaped the tragedy. "They were really angry at the man who did this evil. We shared the hope of Jesus. We talked about how their assignment got moved, then God drew them here to talk to us so they could understand that He had protected them. They realized God had spared their lives. We asked, 'What do you want to do with that?' They gave their lives to Jesus."

Calvary Chapel believers have been ministering to hundreds of memorial visitors, Rich said. "When Pastor Jimmy Morales came, one woman came to talk to him. She was crying. Within a few minutes, she had accepted Christ. We have seen backslidden Christians want to come back to Christ, and tourists who just came to see the memorial being broken." One man, a tough-looking construction worker, sat with Rich and the team and wept and talked for 20 minutes after he saw that one of the victims was from his hometown of Bakersfield, CA. "God just wants us to be there, to touch them." He added that they have shared the same verse with thousands of people:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. PSALM 46:1

Calvary Chapel Las Vegas
cclasvegas.org

Calvary Chapel Lone Mountain
cclonemountain.org



Photo by Kathy Morales

Top left: Many attend a candlelight memorial service for victims of the shootings.

Top center: Allison (left), Andrew (aqua shirt), Pastor Derek Neider (center), and Allison's family pose for a picture after the young couple gave their lives to Christ the Sunday after the shooting.

Bottom right: Jessica Latta (left) and Mary Pfeifer (center) of CC Aurora, CO, pray with a woman at a memorial site on the Las Vegas Strip.

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