



"FOLLOW MY VOICE"

I am Debbie Mantooth Walters, born a preacher's kid and lifelong witness of some of the most wonderful servants and friends of Jesus including my parents.

What a blessing and impact each has had on my life!

Believe it or not, I was in my very first Christmas Pageant at just 5-weeks old playing the part of baby Jesus. I am very thankful I was born just in time for that very special Christmas pageant in Taylor, Texas.

Throughout my life God has been ever present and has said “yes,” “no,” and “wait” to my requests. He also guides me, through His Holy Spirit, at all times of my life even at times when I don’t know to ask or don’t think quick enough on my feet to do so at the VERY moment I need Him most.

THIS is one of the moments I want to share with you now.

You’ll know why very soon.

In 2005, Gary and I were asked by Brother Carl Teel to be a part of the Christian Church Evangelistic Network (CCEN). This was to be the very first conference of which annual ones would follow. There were many Christian ministers and their wives coming to speak and lead sessions from across the country. I was to lead the singing for the conference and Gary and I were to help with group discussions and other things.

My husband, Gary, ended up needing to stay behind here in San Antonio that year because of the church at home and work but encouraged me to go.

So, I got my song books and music together and took the flight to Branson, MO.

The conference got off to a terrific start! The singing and sessions were wonderful! You can’t beat preachers and their wives for singing you know!

This conference’s purpose was to “START A FIRE!” A fire of evangelism across the globe.

Well, the last evening before the close of the conference, a group of us sat around until about mid-night talking about the next day’s sessions and the songs that we’d sing. We all said our good nights and went to our respective rooms for a quick rest knowing we’d be back up again early for the closing session.

We had no idea what was to happen before day break!

About 3:30 or 4am I woke up just enough to hear very loud talking and some banging on doors. I thought it was strange but brushed it off thinking it was some large group coming in late so I tried to go back to sleep.

After about 15 or 20 minutes more the loud voices and banging continued. I was a little afraid to open my room door but thought I might should see what was really going on.

I cautiously opened the door. I looked and could not believe what I was seeing!

Black billowing smoke was flowing through the hallway. The smoke was so thick I could not see to the other side of the hall.

I quickly closed the door and said out loud "This is NOT happening!"

As I turned from the door, I could see then that my room was full of smoke. I went to my balcony door and tried to open it and couldn't at first then realized it was dead bolted. I opened the door and saw two men standing on the sidewalk below. I called out to them and asked, "Can I come down to you from here?" as I was on the second floor. One man told me "No, go out your room and down the hall and down the stairs to this side door." I asked the man again, "Can't I come down to you from here? The smoke is thick and I can't see or breath in it. I will have to hold my breath for some time to get to the door."

But he was insistent that I come down through the hall and out the side door.

So, I turned, took a breath and began creeping and feeling my way down the hall. I finally found the turn that lead to the stairs. So, I quickly made my way down the stairs and pushed the bar on the door that would lead me out.

The door didn't open!

Nor was there anyone still standing outside the door. The two men that were there before and had directed me from my balcony were gone.

I pushed on the bar again and then again for the third time with all my might.

Still, the door would not open!

In disbelief and trying not to panic, I turned and leaned against the door holding my song book close and my purse swung over my shoulder.

I looked and saw that there were two choices. There were stairs leading down and stairs leading me back up from where I came through the thick smoke.

Believe this, I did not want to go back up in the smoke! But I certainly wasn't going down.

While I was looking up at the smoke and the stairs
a man's voice said to me, "**FOLLOW MY VOICE.**"

Now this was strange, because I had not called out to anyone. I hadn't screamed out or talked out loud. I thought I was all alone. I couldn't see anyone and yet he was not yelling to me.

He simply said, "**FOLLOW MY VOICE.**"

Then I felt really strange doing this but I did it anyway. I asked out loud, "Where Are You?"

And the man's voice said again and out loud to me, "**FOLLOW MY VOICE.**"

Do you see that he didn't answer my question? He simply answered, "FOLLOW MY VOICE."

At that point, I began going back up the stairs toward the thick billowing smoke, then took a breath and began my journey through the blackest smoke trying to feel my way to something. Anything but fire.

I saw a glimpse of light and headed that direction. As I came closer to the light and what I knew to be an opened door, I looked to my right and there I saw about ten feet from the door a white shoulder and the side of a man's face with long brown hair.

I reached out to touch him on his shoulder to see his face but he moved a little more toward the smoke. In other words he was going in the opposite direction of the door and was going toward the smoke.

I jerked back my hand and thought I would find out later who it was standing there.

As I came out of the building, many were already outside. We began trying to account for everyone. There were some still needing to be rescued that could only be reached by fire ladders.

As I stood watching the event unfold, one of the preachers came and said to me, "I was crawling on the floor, my room was just down from yours, and I couldn't find my way out but I saw your feet as they passed by and they led me out!" He said, "I don't think I would have made it out if I hadn't seen your feet."

To this day, I can't write or say that without shedding tears.

Do you know that this is what God calls us to do?!

Simply, "***FOLLOW MY VOICE.***"

There are those that are lost that can be saved IF we will but follow the Lord and do what He says to do!

I had no idea anyone else was still in the smoke at that point. I was just trying to make my way through a very big problem!

I have wondered why the preacher crawling on the floor did not hear anything and only saw my feet.

I have wondered who the men were who were so insistent I come through that side door and then were no longer there when I got there.

I do know the door was locked because later another minister was looking for me, as he has been a life long friend of my father, and had to break that door to get in.

We had the closing program at a local Christian Church who graciously opened their doors for us. There we were able to clean up and gather our things and make our arrangements to return home.

I didn't hurry to shower away the ashes and remained covered in ash throughout the closing program and the long flight home. My voice was damaged temporarily for a number of days from breathing in the smoke for such a long period of time.

I wouldn't change those moments I spent in the smoke for anything!

Whether the man's voice I heard was a man or an angel I know he was sent from God.

And I still hear His words, "*FOLLOW MY VOICE.*"

I hope you are encouraged to hear God's voice through His word as He leads you to love Him above everything, following Him in Baptism and then to tell others about Him bringing them to the knowledge of the Truth.

God bless you in your witness for Him everyday and in every moment!

It matters which direction you are leading those who will follow.

Lead them to salvation and to the feet of the Saviour.