



The Incredible
Journey

*THE GREATEST
ACT OF
Kindness*



GARY KENT

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GREATEST
ACT OF
KINDNESS*

*"No act of kindness, however small,
is ever wasted." – Aesop*

*"Kindness is a gift, everyone can
afford to give." – Unknown*

I'm sure we've all heard people talking about random acts of kindness: just randomly doing kind things for other people. Most people have done something like that at one time or another. Maybe it was to help a little old lady cross the street, or to stoop to pick up something that a person dropped.

Then there are times when people do acts of kindness that are not random. Rather, they are thought out and planned in advance. When we think about this type of kindness, we can begin to find an answer to the most important question anyone can ask: *What is God really like?*

In the early 20th century, there was great hope that science and technology would usher in an era of peace and prosperity. But unfortunately, it was not to be. What happened dashed everyone's hopes!

The last century was a time of war, famine, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, pollution, revolution, natural disasters, poverty and crime. In fact, science and technology, though helping in some ways, have made life much worse in many others.

Who in the 19th century ever worried about things like nuclear war, chemical weapons, and global warming? And the worries only seem to be escalating.

Of all the terrible events that occurred in the 20th century, without question one of the greatest symbols of its evil was the Nazi death camp, Auschwitz. It was originally built as barracks for the Polish military, and the Nazis turned it into the most infamous killing operation in the history of the world. It's estimated that in the four years it operated, more than 1.1 million people were systematically murdered within its gates. Most of them were Jews.

One of the most frightening statements about the coldness and efficiency of Auschwitz came from the mouth of the commandant, Rudolph Höss. After his arrest, Höss was interviewed in his cell in Nuremberg. When asked about his part in running the death camp, he said: "The exterminations were just a small part of my work. Every night the telephone would ring, and I would be summoned somewhere. I was run-down, not only because of the exterminations but because of the other work, too."

Remember that the exterminations he was talking about weren't termites, but men, women, and children.

Yet in the midst of all this evil, we discover the story of Captain Witold Pilecki in a book entitled: *The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery*. The subtitle

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"*There is power in kindness.*"
– Unknown

reads: "The only man who volunteered to be captured and imprisoned at Auschwitz to bring out the story of the camp."

Yes, you read this correctly. While almost every person who was brought to Auschwitz understandably wanted to escape, this man purposely allowed himself to be captured and sent there.

Why would anyone do that? Why would anyone make such a sacrifice of himself, and purposely enter into this horrific experience? This is a powerful story about a selfless man.

Witold Pilecki was born in 1901, which meant that he was in his late thirties when the war broke out and his nation, Poland, was invaded and devastated by the Nazis. He had been in the Polish army during the end of World War I and had fought as an officer against the Bolsheviks during the Soviet-Polish War of 1919-1920.

After the nation's defeat by the Nazis, Captain Pilecki joined the Polish underground, where he heard rumours of horrific events in the Auschwitz concentration camp. He determined to find out exactly what was happening there.

Some eyewitness stories had emerged, but they were sketchy. He determined that someone in authority needed to see and bring the story to the world. He also wanted to start a resistance movement in the camp. The only way to accomplish this was to go there himself. And the only way he could do that was to get himself arrested—intentionally.

So, that is exactly what Witold Pilecki did, although he was fully aware that he might never leave the camp alive.

Using false identity papers, Witold Pilecki

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"Sometimes a kind word is everything."

- Unknown

deliberately went out during a Warsaw Street roundup and was caught by the Germans, along with some 2,000 other civilians. After two days' detention in the barracks, where prisoners suffered beatings with rubber clubs, Pilecki was sent to Auschwitz.

He became one of the millions who walked under the infamous sign at the main entrance of the camp: "Arbeit Macht Frei (Work Sets You Free)". The sign implied that if you worked hard, you could live. It was one of many Nazi lies, for the Germans had no intention of letting anyone leave Auschwitz alive.

Pilecki described his introduction to the camp. "Together with a hundred other people, I at last reached the bathroom. Here we gave everything away into bags, to which respective numbers were tied. Here our hair on head and body was cut off, and we were lightly sprinkled by cold water. I got a blow in my jaw with a heavy rod. I spat out my

two teeth, bleeding began. From that moment we became mere numbers - I wore the number 4859."

Pilecki suffered greatly. The food rations were calculated in such a way that most people would live for only six weeks. Pilecki recounts what he was told by a German officer: "Whoever will live longer — it means he steals. You will be placed in a special commando, where you will live short." This was aimed to cause as rapid a mental breakdown as possible.

Somehow, though, even amid those horrific circumstances, he managed to live a lot longer than six weeks.

Pilecki was assigned to backbreaking work, carrying rocks in a wheelbarrow. But he was young, strong, and

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"Sometimes it only takes one act of kindness and caring to change a person's life."

- Jackie Chan

determined to do what he came to do, which was to get information about the camp and communicate it to the outside world. Astonishingly, he found ways to do this.

He smuggled messages out with prisoners who escaped. Sometimes, Nazi guards assigned Poles to take their laundry into town, and messages would be smuggled along with the dirty clothes, to be passed to the Polish underground.

For the next two and a half years, Pilecki slowly worked to feed his reports up the Polish chain of command to London. He confirmed, in 1941, that the Nazis were exterminating Jews. In 1942 he started sending information to the outside world about the gas chambers in Auschwitz.

His reports reached Britain and the United States, providing the most detailed information about the inner working of the concentration camps.

The problem was that the reports were so horrific it was almost impossible for people on the outside to believe them!

Though he had hoped to organise a rebellion in the camp, it never happened.

Finally, in April 1943, after more than two years in this horrific environment, believing that he had done all he could, Pilecki decided to get out. When assigned to a night shift at a camp bakery outside the fence, he and two comrades overpowered a guard, cut the phone line, and escaped. They took with them reams of documents stolen from the Germans. His was the world's first intelligence report on Auschwitz written by someone who had been on the inside.

"Kindness is the language that the deaf can hear and the blind can see."

- Mark Twain

Though Pilecki survived the war as one of Poland's greatest heroes, he didn't survive the Communists, who took over after the defeat of the Nazis. They accused him of being a spy, and he was executed in 1948. The details of Pilecki's bravery could not truly emerge until after the collapse of Communism. He was posthumously awarded the Order of Polonia Restituta in 1995, and the Order of the White Eagle, Poland's highest decoration, in 2006.

Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Chief Rabbi of Warsaw, Poland, said this of Captain Pilecki: "When God created the human being, God had in mind that we should all be like Captain Witold Pilecki, of blessed memory. May the life of Witold Pilecki inspire us all to do one more good deed, of any kind, each and every day of our lives."

What an act of bravery! And even if Pilecki had known in advance that he would survive, the fact that he was

willing to suffer what he did, and for so long, says a great deal about the character of this man. No wonder he is deemed a hero. Even Hollywood produced a movie about him called "Operation Auschwitz".

The story of Witold Pilecki also reminds us of the story of Jesus of Nazareth. What Witold Pilecki did is a faint shadow of what Jesus did in coming to this world. In fact, considering who Jesus was before He came here, what He left in order to come here, and what He endured while here, Jesus' sacrifice was so much greater. Let us consider this now.

First, look at what these texts say about Jesus.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a

servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

Let's look deeper into what is being said here, because these words capture the essence of what I want to share. They capture a truth that has changed my life and the lives of millions of others. In them is found a hope for something so much better than any this world can offer.

First, these texts say that Jesus was equal to God. That Jesus was, in fact, God!

The theme that occurs again and again throughout the Bible is that God created our world. The galaxies that rotate and move through the vast spaces of the cosmos; the birds that sing outside our windows; the stars that shine in the night sky; the orchards of fruit and

fields of grain: the Bible tells us that God created all these things. And that includes human beings as well.

I know that some very eminent and learned men have assured us that we exist simply by chance. Richard Dawkins has made a career out of his proposition that God does not exist and that we are here by accident alone. He jets across the globe arguing that all the beauty, the design, and all the incredible complexity just happened by chance. Our world appears that it has been designed but, he assures us, it really hasn't.

Some are even arguing now that our world and everything in our universe were created out of nothing. There's a book called *A Universe from Nothing*. Perhaps you share my feeling that the idea of the universe arising from nothing is somewhat irrational, to say the least.

The Bible, on the other hand, teaches

that God, yes, Jesus Himself, created the world. *"All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made"* (John 1:3). Jesus is God, the Creator.

Let's think about the power of Jesus. Think about the size and scope of the universe. We can barely wrap our minds around it, can we? And yet He is the One who made it all! I simply don't think the human mind, as wondrous and amazing as it is, is able to grasp this. I know mine can't!

The texts I quoted earlier have more to say. After talking about Jesus being God, we are told that he "...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men."

Let us try to grasp what this is saying, for it is the most amazing truth in all creation. God—Jesus, the One who created the entire universe, every star,

every galaxy, everything that exists on this earth - voluntarily made Himself of "no reputation". Another translation of the Bible says: He "made himself nothing". That is, He left wherever He existed before, the courts of heaven, and came to this earth as a servant, in the likeness of humanity.

Maybe you saw the movie *12 Years a Slave*, based on the true story of a free-born black man in New York in the 1800s. Solomon Northup was an accomplished violinist who was lured to Washington DC and then kidnapped and sold into slavery in the Confederate south.

What a terrible turn of events for any man! And yet the Bible says that Jesus chose to come to this earth as a "bond servant". The Greek word there can also be translated "slave".

Each of these texts tells us clearly that God, the Creator, chose to come down

to our world, to our fallen, violent and dangerous world. And He came down as a human being to be a servant to others.

Look at what the Bible says about Jesus: "*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him*" (John 1:10).

Please pause to understand the full impact of this. He was in the world, the world that He Himself had created! Again, let the ramifications of this idea sink into your consciousness. It's the most wondrous, hopeful, and amazing truth that we could ever know.

How unfortunate it is that Christmas has become virtually a commercial holiday. But if we can get past the reindeer, Santa Claus and the gingerbread man, the story of Jesus' birth becomes the incredible account of how our Creator come to this earth in the form of a human infant.

Here is what the Bible says about Him coming to our world:

"So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:6,7).

This firstborn son is Jesus. This is the same Jesus who is God, the same Jesus without whom *"...nothing was made that was made"*. The same Jesus who *"...was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him"* (John 1:10).

Here, in these few verses in the Gospel of Luke we are given a depiction of Jesus - God - having voluntarily left the courts of heaven, coming to this earth, to be born in a manger, in a stable with animals.

Jesus came to this earth as a human, to live here among us. That would have been amazing enough. That He became a "bond servant" would have been a more incredible condescension. But Jesus, our Creator God, did even more.

After describing Jesus as being equal to God, after talking about him becoming a human being and a servant, the text says: "*And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*" (Philippians 2:8).

Remember that these passages in the Bible are talking about our Creator, the God who made the heavens and the earth. He humbled Himself, the King of the Universe, and became a human being who was obedient unto death, even the death on the Cross.

Grasp with me what the Bible is teaching. I believe that this is the most incredible

truth, not just in the world, but in all creation. And that's because the God of all creation, the One "...*through whom are all things, and through whom we live*" (1 Corinthians 8:6), our Creator, was the same One who left the grandeur and glory of heaven to come to this world and to die on the Cross.

Friend, look at Jesus on the Cross and Behold your God! *Behold your Creator!* Because that is really what the Cross is about. It's about what our Creator, the Creator of the universe, is like. That is Him on the Cross, having voluntarily left heaven to come to this earth, to live as a servant of others, and then to die. He came to pay in Himself the penalty for our sins and our wrong deeds.

That is what the Cross is about. His deity was covered, hidden in His humanity. But that was the Creator God, my God and your God, hanging there, dying the death that should have been ours. But

it doesn't have to be, thanks to what Jesus has done for us. Thanks to the fact that Jesus, our God, *"...humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."*

Years ago, a famous mathematician named Morris Kline wrote this about the human race: "The plight of man is pitiable. We are wanderers in a vast universe, helpless before the devastations of nature, dependent upon nature for food and other necessities, and uninformed about why we were born and what we should strive for. Man is alone in a cold and alien universe."

I disagree. That's because I believe in the Cross. At the Cross, we see our Creator God pouring out Himself in the most incredible self-sacrificing and self-denying act of love the entire cosmos has ever witnessed.

No, we are not alone in this vast universe. We have a Creator, a God who not only created us in an act of love, but who redeemed us in an even greater act of love. What does it tell us about the kind of universe we live in when the God who created and sustains it is the same God who purposely came to this world and allowed Himself to be crucified on a cross? Even more importantly, what does that tell us about what this God is like?

The story of Witold Pilecki in Auschwitz tells me a great deal about his character. He was a man whom one could trust. A man on whom one could count as a friend.

What does the Cross of Christ tell us about the character of God? What does it tell us about Him that He would leave the glory of heaven and die on the Cross?

It tells me that He is God, whom I can love and trust. That's precisely why I do love and trust Him. We also learn from the Bible that what Jesus did on the Cross was not a random act of kindness. It was a well-thought-out master plan, the plan of salvation, whose centrepiece was the 'Greatest Act of Kindness' this world has ever witnessed.

The same Jesus who hung on the Cross is calling out to each of us, to come to Him and receive the life, the eternal life, that His self-sacrificial death offers to us all.

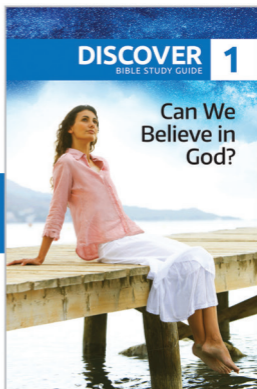
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Australia

0481 315 101

info@tij.tv

The Incredible Journey
GPO Box 274
Sydney NSW 2001

New Zealand

020 422 2042

infonz@tij.tv

The Incredible Journey
PO Box 76673
Manukau, Auckland 2241



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We can learn a lot about people by the kind of acts that they perform, regardless of whether they focus on themselves, or are self-sacrificing and loving people. Gary Kent points us to the greatest and most self-sacrificing act in all creation, Jesus giving His life to save this world. He then asks, what does this tell us about the character of our God?



The Incredible Journey



Pastor Gary Kent is Speaker for The Incredible Journey ministry. He holds a B.A. in Theology, M.A. in Ancient History & Archaeology, and M. in Divinity. He has produced and presented numerous documentaries on subjects including the Bible, Bible prophecy, world events and natural health. His passion is to share the good news of Jesus' imminent return.

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Australia

0481 315 101

info@tij.tv

New Zealand

020 422 2042

infonz@tij.tv



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