

1: THERE'S A DISTURBANCE IN THE FORCE

IT'S NOT MY FAULT!

After many years of traveling and “living the dream,” I got the shock of a lifetime—one that helped me wake up and see why things seemed so desperate at times.

Growing up as the nephew of Chet Atkins, aka “Mr. Guitar,” one of the men credited with creating the “Nashville Sound” and the designer of both Gretsch and Gibson guitars, was both a blessing and a curse. As a kid, I saw from backstage what that life was all about, and I thought that destiny was mine, no matter what corners I'd cut or what truths I'd eventually compromise.

You see, I was raised in a Christian home where I experienced God's love at a very young age. Yet the Christianity I learned only went so deep. Even though my dad was a deacon in the church and a well-respected citizen as the owner of the local grocery store, there were inconsistencies in our church life and our home. No skeletons in the closet or horrible sin behind closed doors, but the small things that seemed to be no big deal—pride, envy, and gossip—were accepted as normal. Then there were the things you should have been doing, things taught from the pulpit that were overlooked on the home front. To some degree, I guess you could say there was a form of godliness but a denying of its power (2 Timothy 3:5).

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I will never forget hearing J. Vernon McGee on the radio years later: "And may I say to you, my brethren, if the Methodists were afraid of sin like they were afraid of the Holy Spirit, they'd be doing all right." For me, that summed it up pretty well.

I AM ALTERING THE DEAL. PRAY I DON'T ALTER IT ANY FURTHER.

So, very disillusioned, at a young age and without a high school diploma, I left the farmlands of southern Ohio and launched on my own quest to find out what life was all about.

During the latter part of those early vagabond years, I got a call from my little Jewish friend Abby. She had recently moved back to New York and was living in a community near the university she was attending. "Nick, you've got to get out here; you won't believe what I've found! I'm living in a house in Port Jefferson with the coolest people in New York. I can't even describe it to you; you have to come check it out. It's so cool!"

The day before, I had seen my neighbor hauled off to jail by a Drug Task Force for dealing cocaine. I knew if I stayed in Huntington Beach any longer, I'd be next. The offer was intriguing and the grass definitely looked greener than where I was! Abby loved my music and knew I had a lifelong ambition to give "Greenwich Village" a spin around the block; yet little did I know that this Long Island community was all about the "New Age" and influenced by its own resident guru. Let's call him "Shade." I had no clue what I was about to get myself into.

Some weeks later, I arrived at 2:00 a.m., and Abby had stayed awake to greet me. The first indicator that I was in foreign territory was when I got up to take a shower the next morning, shaving with the door open. A small Bin Laden-type of a guy started screaming, "There's a heathen in the bathroom scraping his face with metal!" My next tip-off was finding a group of tofu eaters gathered around

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my half-eaten bag of McDonald's in the refrigerator, wondering how in the world it got there. Oops! Even though my landing was a little rough, I was very curious, to say the least, at what these interesting people were all about. I never really knew any tree-huggers before, and that they were in the worst way. They had the hand-knitted sweaters and all to prove it! I quickly started revamping my attire and adapting to their popular form of vocabulary so as not to stand out, but I think I was only fooling myself.

READY ARE YOU? WHAT KNOW YOU OF READY?

After my initial meeting with Shade, I was welcomed into the community. He assured me that he could help me get off cocaine, an addiction I could only afford to support by dealing. I was growing tired of living under the fear of prison, which haunted me everywhere I went!

Just before leaving California, a biker called Spider sought me out for product. He was a gnarly, one-eyed felon who closed the deal by grabbing my cheeks and kissing me on the mouth, saying, "You'd make a great cell momma!" (That's the "PG" version.) What made things worse was that I began taking product across the borders to Alaska to the pipeline workers. I made a ton of money doing that, but the paranoia that came with the baggage wasn't worth it.

I made a pact right there with Shade to quit. He said he would help me get auditions with his nightclub connections in Manhattan and promised to show me the ropes of traveling in and out of downtown by subway. He showed me how to get out of Penn Station by 1:00 a.m. (anything later and I'd be a dead man) before it closed. That late at night, the subways were crawling with all kinds of interesting people. I learned from Shade that all you had to do was act like you were crazier than them. If you know me well, you know that's not hard at all. Once I got this down, I fell in love with the Manhattan nightlife; it was a whole new world.

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I'VE GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.

That weekend back at the ranch, they had a full moon party with a Rastafarian band in the garden, and many young students were there to experience the channeling that was rumored to take place afterwards. In reality, this place was none other than an outpost of Satan working through these mellow crusaders of darkness, and I was their newest convert. The evening climaxed with about thirty devout third-eye diehards sitting around in the lotus position omming. The rafters were ringing with what I know now to be a counterfeit form of worship; and believe me, it was powerfully anointed, only it was coming from the dark side. There was definitely a disturbance in the force.

After about thirty minutes, they set a curious new visitor in the middle of the circle with our fearless leader, Shade. He would speak from out of his trance and point to places on their bodies, telling them things that had happened at different times in their lives. "When you were twelve, you broke a rib. When you were fourteen, you had your appendix taken out." Almost every time, the mesmerized student would nod in awe as others would gasp in amazement. On this evening, Shade was calling all the shots. He wasn't the ascended master type of guru, but he was seriously on his way. At any rate, he had some notches in his belt (or maybe I should say swag), and he seemed to be somewhat revered. He had only been fasting from dairy products for eight years, a practice that clears out your sinus cavities, allowing you to supposedly be more sensitive to the universal spiritual realm. It is believed that the longer you've fasted, the more auras you could get into when reading a person.

Sometimes, we would have gurus visit our full moon parties who were far more qualified because of their fasting rituals. These "more enlightened" dudes could not only tell a person what might have happened at a specific time in their life, but also about the circumstances surrounding it.

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These gurus are no different than the sorcerers we find in the Bible who leaned on dark supernatural enlightenments to influence reality. These fallen angels can draw on anything they want to know about a person's life and past. Realize, these fallen angels can know the most secret things about a person, even intimate things between a man and wife, and can bring them out in a real-life séance through someone who is channeling them or in a setting like the ones I was in where youth are prowling in the wrong places. It can leave the victim not only aroused by the dark powers, but also completely opened up and vulnerable to their influences. I mean, this kind of thing will come to us without us even looking for it.

The book of Acts has a record of much profit being made from this kind of power.

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.

Acts 16:16

Notice how condescending these demons were to Paul.

This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days.

Acts 16:17–18a

Take note that the demons in this girl were blatantly mocking Paul's beliefs, and I experienced this kind of mocking personally while living in this community.

THERE IS GOOD IN HIM—I'VE FELT IT.

When I was eight years old, I had a conversion experience inspired by an Indian missionary doctor staying in our home while visiting our church. He explained the Gospel to me in such a simple yet

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powerful way that I totally got it. After praying with him, I not only told my parents and friends about my conversion, but I openly confessed Jesus as my Lord in my second-grade class where we were asked to share what we wanted to be when we grew up. Even at that age, this was not a popular move among fellow classmates, and it resulted in an unforgettable disconnect. Without any growth happening spiritually, my little faith was shortly thereafter scorched out. I wanted to be a missionary doctor. Yet sadly enough, no one took an eight-year-old seriously, not even in our church, except the Indian doctor who, by this time, was on the other side of the world.

It was the 1960s and our Sunday school teachers, in my opinion, were very nervous babysitters, basically unprepared and uninspired, but with an awesome flannel board (the decade's equivalent to PowerPoint, when used accurately). Needless to say, I became so bored at church that I began to give way to my class-clown disposition. I remember telling the teacher I wanted to do the teaching one Sunday morning. Dumbstruck, she cautiously surrendered the stewardship of the flannel board over to me. I started off with the ark of Noah, and then I put Jesus directly behind it. She thought I might be onto something inspirational ... until I quickly put a very large banana under Him with some animals on it and said they were water skiing behind the ark.

After that, my Sunday school life seemed to take a downward spiral; most of it was spent standing out in the hall for some display of a bad attitude or cynical remark made without repentance. Today, I love having an audience with Sunday school teachers to enlighten them about their responsibility and the chance they get to be a powerful influence on the world around them, if they just get in tune with what God is doing in these little ones.

Well, because of a lack of attention in the church, I quickly found there was someone who gave me very serious attention at that young age—Satan's go-betweens! By giving heed to their influence, it only took about four years before I was not only stealing cartons of cigarettes from our family store to be popular with my friends, but also

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trading them with my older brother's friends for pot. When I was fourteen, a friend's mom found a nickel bag of pot in his room, and he told his mom that he had bought it from me. After the word got out to my already suspicious mom, she had the son of a worker in the store, an Ohio State highway patrolman, come and inspect my room. Not only did he find a quarter-pound of pot and mass paraphernalia, but he also found a prescription bottle of Valium. He told my mom that a kid my age shouldn't have any of this. As one would expect, things got pretty dicey after that!

THE DARK SIDE OF THE FORCE IS THE PATHWAY TO MANY ABILITIES SOME CONSIDER TO BE ... UNNATURAL.

Now, some sixteen years later after my conversion experience, in this New Age community, I found it unnervingly strange that these very things came out when a much more enlightened visiting guru began scanning my aura at another full moon turnout. I sat there in the lotus position surrounded by our increasing group of omming converts, and after a few minutes of observation, he exclaimed that at the age of eight I had played with the *Christ Spirit*. Now you tell me, how in the world would these guys know this and call me on it? I couldn't deny it nor defend it. Then in the same setting, they mocked it and proclaimed that the Christ Spirit was a fairy tale for misguided youth, and I was proof. I sat there dumbfounded, like a deer caught in the headlights. I was busted.

Later, my friends would make fun of this in such haughty ways and at the most awkward times before others, flaunting such conceit against Christianity. You can imagine how powerless I felt. The worst thing about it was that my backslidden character helped sully their view of Christianity even more. And believe me, they made sure to advance their borders and keep me in my place. Up until this point, I thought the whole thing was some enchanting game, but now something had struck that minor chord deep down inside me and left me feeling vulnerable and utterly abandoned—like I had

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just crossed some imaginary line where everything was telling me, “There’s no going back.” I was emotionally and spiritually trapped, a trespasser. It was like these principalities knew I was somehow touched by grace even then, and they were making their move.

IT’S A TRAP!

Much later, as a new believer, when I read the text in Acts 16 for the first time where the possessed slave girl confronted Paul, I was completely taken back to my experiences. When I saw the power that Satan gave this girl to see into people’s lives, I realized this was what had happened with these gurus. I immediately thought, *There it is; it is real. It’s in the Bible!* I was thrilled all the more to see the power God had given Paul over her possessors. The reality of Christ’s power in us and His authority demonstrated through us struck me like never before. This is the Christianity the world around us today is crying out for. How many can say like Paul, “My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4). “When [Jesus] had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits” (Matthew 10:1a).

Notice the authority we have in Jesus over the power of Satan as you read what Paul does here: “But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour” (Acts 16:18b). Like Jesus, we now see Paul dealing with these annoying demons like he was flicking off a pesky fly. It would seem like that was the situation with other believers in the early church also, when Paul points out to the Corinthians, “lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

THEY’LL SOON BE BACK, AND IN GREATER NUMBERS.

In my short six months in that community, I met many demon-possessed people like this gal in Acts 16—people who could

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perform unreal mind-over-matter, telepathic, and ESP-type things. The worst for me were those crusaders dressed in orange, passing through from the Rajneesh community in Oregon. They came on so friendly, but without restraint they would quickly reveal a very scary, dark side! One night as I was cooking for our visitors, one of them was jumping up and down practicing the dynamic meditation thing right next to me; it looks like a little kid having a tantrum, only they are big! I stared at him in astonishment, thinking, *Really, dude?* He stopped and gazed at me with evil eyes of horror. Then, with slobber on his beard and the most wretched road-kill breath, he whispered like the Grinch in my ear, "I will kill you, you Christ-Spirit ninny!" Naturally, I learned very quickly how to sleep with one eye open while living there. *Thank You, Lord, that today I can sleep with both eyes closed, in peace and without medication.*

Shade, our own resident guru, was a dropout from the '60s, a part-time bike messenger in Manhattan who used his guru talents to live off the students. Days when we'd be home together and the others would be off to school, he would teach me how to meditate, and I was soon accepted into the group meditation sessions that would often happen in the evenings. I began to dive into this new experience with all I had. After a few months, Shade told me my third eye was developing well. He wanted me to fast all day, and the next morning, he would teach me how to have an out-of-body experience. Everybody was telling me this was the ultimate, that when I got good enough, I could travel anywhere I wanted. I guess it's kind of like Google Earth or something. The next morning we broke the fast with Psilocybin mushrooms, a catalyst for the out-of-body thing—really that alone would have done the job—but I wanted to see what this was all about. We sat lotus-like in the living room and did our omming for about thirty minutes. After that long, you begin to feel your blood cool as it slows in your veins; your body even starts to chill. At that point he said, "You're ready! With your eyes closed, gaze around the room through your third eye. Can you see it?" I responded that I could. "Good. Now just pop out like a bubble and float around the room."

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TRAVELING THROUGH HYPERSPACE AIN'T LIKE DUSTING CROPS, BOY.

I don't know if it was all in my head or the mushrooms, but everything he said was happening. As I began to float around the room, I was rising above us like a helium balloon toward the corner. I hit and bounced off the wall ... and then the other wall. As I spun around, I could see us sitting in the lotus position in the middle of the room. But then I saw something else; it was something like little gargoyles all over his back. They were whispering into his ears what he was repeating to me! In my mind, I flashed to that phone call with Abby inviting me out there and saw them on her back whispering into her ears what she was saying to me. Then I saw something I'll never forget. Shade wasn't sitting there with his eyes closed. His eyes were open and gazing at me with lust; this guy had another agenda! Like a clap, I was back in my body. As I looked up at Shade, there he sat, looking at me with bated breath, almost smacking his lips. I immediately jumped to my feet, ran down the stairs into the kitchen, and cried out, "I plead the blood of Jesus Christ!"

That phrase was something my older brother Dave had taught me many years earlier; he said at the time that I would need it someday. One day, while sharing his testimony with me, Dave saw how hard my heart was and how far I'd probably go before realizing how lost I really was. He left me with words that would never escape me. "You are going to be on the doorstep of hell before you see your need for the Lord. I just want you to know, no matter where you are or what you find yourself in, you can always plead the blood of Jesus!" Man, I knew without a doubt I was on that doorstep! There, on my knees in the middle of this outpost of Satan, in tears, I began to scream with all my might, "I plead the blood of Jesus! I plead the blood of Jesus! I plead the blood of Jesus!"

The next thing I knew, I could hear Shade screaming like a little girl, as he ran up the stairs into his attic domicile. Though I would remain in that house somewhat debilitated for another three days, I would never see Shade again.

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HELP ME, OBI-WAN KENOBI, YOU'RE MY ONLY HOPE.

That afternoon, as everyone began arriving home, they kept asking where he was. When I finally told them that he was in the attic, they left it alone. The next day, as no response came from his quarters, they asked me what had happened. I wouldn't admit to anything and played it off as nothing. At about three in the morning, as I lay there with the other newcomers who shared the floor in the library, I could hear him creeping through the house. I began to smell an odd odor I couldn't quite figure out. As I looked over at the girl on my right side, she was gazing at me through the dark with wide-open, suspicious eyes. When we made eye contact, she said, "What did you do?" With chills, I exclaimed, "Nothing!" I then asked her what the smell was. She told me it was Shade burning sage to purify the house and asked me again what I had done. Just like the night before, I thought to myself, *Tomorrow, I'm out of here!* Yet when daytime came, I sat there powerless, unable to put enough thoughts together to leave, thinking everything would just blow over.

The next morning, as I sat in total fear, a knock came at the door. It was a little Italian New York gal I knew from a local winery where I played Thursday nights. We had actually dated a few times until I learned from Abby that she was the daughter of a mafia leader. Hearing that, I had an inner-body experience: I envisioned myself wearing cement shoes, sinking to the bottom of the Long Island Sound. She was there to buy some of the "Thai Stick" I had conveniently imported from California, something very valuable in New York. I knew she was Catholic, so I asked her what she thought about the people in the community where I was living. She said the place gave her the creeps and wondered how I could stay there. I asked, "Can you have someone pray for me, maybe even exorcise me or something?" As I explained what had been happening, she said, "Get your things now; you're moving in with us." The "us" she referred to was five financially well-off female students sharing

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a house together in downtown Port Jefferson, one block from the harbor. She didn't have to ask me twice; in fact, I was in her car before she was!

YOUR EYES CAN DECEIVE YOU—DON'T TRUST THEM.

Now, this *could* have been a fun thing, living with five wealthy young ladies in the middle of one of the most happening places in New York; but it wasn't. When you know the Lord is reaching out to you and you're resisting, it's one of the most miserable places to be, no matter where you are—not to mention the fear of demons tracking you. Remember the rich young ruler? He had everything but was still searching. Yet, when Jesus said to him, "Follow Me," he didn't do it. In fact, "he went away sorrowful" (see Matthew 19:16–22). That is a perfect description of the life I was living.

Over the next six months, I began to make more frequent trips to Manhattan. Eventually, I secured a paying position at a Greenwich Village nightclub, where in time I shared the stage with a Japanese folk singer named Kako Kawade. I had finally achieved a lifelong ambition, yet I couldn't be content after what I had experienced living in that community. I had gotten a sobering glimpse of the reality that lurked behind the curtain—demons—demons that didn't want to be revealed, and demons who were after ME. All I could think was, *If this is real, then GOD IS REAL!* What in the world was I doing? Satan was alive and well with a plan for MY life that made prison look like kindergarten, and I was running around like a fool trying to convince anybody who would listen that I was a somebody!

As if that wasn't bad enough, I soon learned that law enforcement had come to the house where I had lived in California because of two counts against me: child support evasion and a drug charge that I had eluded in Arizona years earlier. My brazen lifestyle was catching up with me, and I could feel it moving in like an unavoidable

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evening shadow; there was no escape. Everywhere I went became sinking sand. Nothing was certain anymore. I had to keep moving. Looking back now, it is clear that the Lord was allowing the perfect storm to bring my time in New York to an end.

AHH, HARD TO SEE, THE DARK SIDE IS.

Desperate for a reason as to why things were the way they were, I began complaining to a seemingly normal couple I had become acquainted with while living on Long Island (they were actually the kind of drug dealers that street-level dealers like me got their stuff from). They swayed me to believe that my biggest problem was my songwriting—it was so absorbed with what others wanted to hear, it was stealing away the good karma. I think we would just call that “the fear of man.” They thought it was stopping me from being who I truly was and convinced me that I needed to escape not only the law, but also this negative energy hovering over me (boy, I’ll say).

They told me about an incredible community of people living on Kodiak Island in Alaska. They visited them every year and said it would be the ultimate retreat—somewhere I could go to and escape all the bad. Many were finding refuge from the law, as they rarely go that far north to pursue anyone. I shared my reservations because of the community where I had lived in Port Jefferson, but they said it was a whole different vibe up there—more like a Jeremiah Johnson kind of thing compared to the hummingbirds I had lived with in New York. Wow! That’s all it took for the Tarzan itch inside of me to wake up and say, “Destiny!” I loved Alaska—the pioneer spirit infusing the air—and I could play my music in the bars while dealing to the pipeline workers. But the stories I had heard of the winters were too scary to really think about staying. I’d heard of these kinds of makeshift villages, but I had never had any connections to someone who knew the old-timers there. I thought that was huge. At this point in my life, I was desperate. So to me, this was definitely a “why not?” moment.

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WHO'S MORE FOOLISH, THE FOOL OR THE FOOL WHO FOLLOWS HIM?

Convinced this could be for me, I made plans to head back up that inside passage one more time. I quickly reverted to the same old way of thinking. Knowing that things were already thawing out in Alaska and that I'd be getting a late start on anything, I made the call and sealed a deal with the guys I knew who worked on the pipeline: I would generously supply them one more time with all the cocaine they could want. It sounds somewhat professional on the surface, but it wasn't. These were guys who had completely lost touch with reality, guys who had a lot of money, a lot of vices, and as a result, a lot of problems. Unless you were called to minister to them, you really wouldn't want to be around them at all. I had six weeks to get my things together and meet my contacts there to make one last drop—one that would ensure a very comfortable life in Kodiak. I would meet them at the Talkeetna Bluegrass Festival about 100 miles north of Anchorage. Meanwhile, after eliminating everything I couldn't carry with me for the umpteenth time, I left New York for Seattle, Washington, to make that amazing trip north to the last frontier. This time, though, that phrase took on a whole new meaning, as there were no plans or desire whatsoever to return to the lower 48 again; to me it would be *my* last frontier.