

GUERRILLA LOVERS

changing the world with
revolutionary compassion

VINCE ANTONUCCI



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GUERRILLA LOVEFARE

Becky sat in the driver's seat of her car, trying not to be noticed. The sun wasn't up quite yet. No one would be coming out of their houses, and even if they did, they probably wouldn't be able to see her. But she hunkered down just in case. She couldn't believe it had come to this. From the beginning she had assumed it would go somewhere, but not here. She had never done anything like this; the thought had never crossed her mind. But now she had to go through with it. And she knew he would be there any minute. She had to be ready. *I can't believe I'm going to do this. I can't believe I'm going to do this. I can't believe I'm going to do this.*



It's about revolution. It's about splashing the kingdom of God all around. Generally I'm not one for war imagery and war metaphors, but it's difficult to ignore the connotation when you're talking about a "revolution."

I am not an expert on warfare, but it seems to me there are two basic ways to engage in a modern-day war. One is *shock*

and awe. This is when the balance of power is on your side, so you move in the troops, roll in the tanks, and drop bombs from above. The goal is to rapidly destroy your enemies and force them into quick submission.

I wonder if, as Christians, we've relied on "shock and awe" tactics too much. We've tried to attract people to Christianity through our big church buildings, slick presentations, cool music, and quality programs.

The other way is *guerrilla warfare*. Guerrilla warfare is a method employed when you're outnumbered by the opposing force. Guerrilla warfare relies on intelligence. You must outthink the enemy.

It also relies on espionage. You must know your opponents, being able to discern where they are, how they think, and what they'll do next.

Guerrilla warfare features strategic surprise attacks. You must hit your opponents when they're not expecting it. These ambushes are usually low-intensity, close-proximity confrontations. You don't have the firepower to blast away from a distance, so you sneak up close, hit 'em quick, and get out of there.

I admit this metaphor breaks down quickly because those we're trying to reach are not our opponents or enemies. They are the people Jesus loves, and we're bringing his love to them. But you get the point. Jesus didn't call us to use shock and awe; he called us to use guerrilla tactics.

It's time to do the kingdom of God the way Jesus taught. It's time to be mustard seeds that pop up as weeds in a garden and then slowly, subtly take over the garden. It's a guerrilla revolution. And it's a *love* revolution, so we are to wage guerrilla *lovetare*. The best way to attract people is through how we live and love.

We are guerrilla lovers.



In the last chapter we looked at how the original church experienced explosive growth between 100 and 311 AD. Why

did it grow so rapidly? Historians who study this suggest two decisive influences. Both of these were . . . *plagues*. Not what you expected? Typically, widespread death-bringing epidemics don't add to anyone's "attendance" numbers, but historians tell us that Christianity grew rapidly in part because of these two horrific plagues. And they were horrific. In some cities, two-thirds of the population died. At the height of one of these plagues, in 251 AD, five thousand people were dying every day.

When the plagues came, everyone fled the cities to avoid the lethal contagion—everyone, that is, except Christians. The Christians stayed and ministered to the sick and dying. Dionysius, then Bishop of Alexandria, wrote of how the Christians responded to the plague of 250 AD. He explains that they

showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead.¹

These first Christians knew they had joined not a religion but a revolution. They knew they could not add others to the revolution with power, so they did it through the way they lived their lives. They became guerrilla lovers. They knew they could catch something and die, but they hoped those to whom they ministered would also catch something—the love of Christ—and live eternally. They chose to be people offering contagious life in a place filled with contagious death, and because of that decision, the revolution spread.



A few years after meeting Jesus and joining the revolution, I decided to go into full-time ministry and then to start a

church. When we started the church I had virtually no experience as a pastor. We moved to a town where we didn't know a single person. The odds were completely against us.

It was perfect.

We had no choice but to get guerrilla.

We selected our name—Forefront: A Church to Turn the World Upside Down—and we chose our mission/purpose/vision statement: *Love God. Love People*. And from day one we taught our people that we were part of a revolution and that we were to be guerrilla lovers.

We wanted to destroy the negative stereotypes people have of Christians and of church. We wanted to make the “Good News” look and sound and feel good again. And we were willing to do anything (other than sin) to help people encounter Jesus and find life in him.

We started feeding homeless people at a shelter and volunteering at a local orphanage. We built a medical clinic in Haiti. We challenged our small groups to find creative ways to serve the community. One time my group landed on the idea of cleaning the bathrooms of local businesses and restaurants. So we gathered a bunch of cleaning supplies and launched out in pairs. The car I was in stopped at a Taco Bell. We explained to the manager that we wanted to scrub the bathrooms, for free, as a service to them. He seemed very perplexed by it all, but he agreed. I volunteered to clean the men's room by myself. It was the worst mistake I have ever made. I walked into the bathroom, put on my gloves, bent down by the toilet, and suddenly “MexiMelt” took on new meaning. Pretty soon I was using *gordita* as a curse word. This happened seven years ago, and I have not eaten in a Taco Bell since. To this day I can't hear the word *chalupa* without throwing up in my mouth a little.

On a Sunday morning in 2001 we asked everyone (without warning) to leave their shoes behind so we could donate them to homeless people. That led one couple to start bringing lunches down to the beach for homeless people, which

soon blossomed into a full-on homeless ministry. Seeing the love of our people for the homeless and the life change it was causing led someone to donate a mobile home, hoping it could be used to get a family off the streets. This led dozens of Forefronters to donate their time to completely renovate it. Finally we were able to present a redone mobile home to a single mom and her son. This led someone else to donate a second mobile home. We completely renovated that one and presented it to another family. This led to our receiving a third mobile home and getting another family off the streets. This trailer park now has sparkling mobile homes with families in them who are beginning to experience and grasp the grace of God. It's like weeds popping up in a garden (or, actually, like flowers popping up in a garden of weeds).

And it's been contagious in all kinds of ways. I was at one of the presentations of a mobile home to a family. The director of our homeless ministry mentioned to me that a neighbor was admiring the swing set our church had put in for the family. This single mom had explained that she was saving up for a swing set like that one for her three children to play on. She had saved most of the money, and once her tax refund came in, she'd be able to purchase it. I told the director, "Tell her not to worry about it, that one of the small groups from our church will buy it for her."

"Really?" he asked.

"Yeah," I told him. "My group will do it."

He said, "Cool, but you tell her."

I said no, but he insisted, and pretty soon he had me standing in front of the neighbor. He explained to her, "This is the pastor of my church. He wants to tell you something."

"Well, I heard that you were saving up for a swing set," I began. "Why don't you keep the money you've saved? My small group will buy a swing set for you and install it."

She seemed confused, giving me the same look she might have if a family of groundhogs had crawled out of my nose,

announced it was a Led Zeppelin cover band, and started singing, “Whole Lotta Love.” She said, “I don’t understand.”

“We just like doing nice things for people . . . because, well, that’s what God is like, and we like to be like him,” I explained. “So we’ll buy you the swing set.”

“But . . .” Huge tears started spilling down her cheeks. “I don’t understand. No one’s ever . . . done anything like this for me. Are you *really* gonna do this for me?”

“Yes. Really.”

She was now in full sob. “Thank you so much. I just—I don’t understand. Thank you so much.” She ran off to tell her kids.

That was one of the best moments of my life.

Our church has always tried to be like that. We’ve always practiced guerrilla lovefare. At one point we decided to try something to spark people who perhaps hadn’t caught on yet. We handed everyone a sealed envelope on their way in to our service several Sundays in a row. At the end of each week’s service we explained that these were guerrilla lover assignments for them to complete in the next seven days. This led to an outbreak of people ordering pizzas for their neighbors, dropping cookies off at fire departments, mowing lawns for old ladies in the neighborhood, buying lunch for the person behind them in the drive-through, cleaning the bathroom at their office, tipping the dishwasher in the restaurant, and much more. Just about everyone completed their guerrilla lover assignment each week. Many continued to do guerrilla lover assignments even after we stopped providing them.



That’s why Becky was sitting in her car that morning.

Becky was one of the people who completed her guerrilla lover assignments but then decided to continue doing them on her own. She began to think creatively about how she could ambush people with God’s love.

So one morning she got up early, baked chocolate chip cookies, went out to her car, slouched down in the seat, and waited nervously. She's not sure why she was so nervous, but she was.

Finally he showed up: the garbage man. As he drove up to her trash can, she sprang out of her car, ran up, and handed him the plate of warm cookies. The garbage man was stunned. He stuttered out a thank-you, explaining that no one had ever done anything for him before. Becky, not knowing quite what to say, blurted out, "Well, I'm a guerrilla lover."

Becky says she couldn't wipe the smile off her face all day. People at work kept asking what she was so happy about. At first she said, "Nothing, you wouldn't understand." But finally they got it out of her. She explained what she had done and how it was maybe the most joy she had ever experienced.

One coworker approached Becky later and asked, "Could I please come to church with you this Sunday?"

Becky was shocked and asked why.

"Well, I don't know," her coworker shrugged. "I want to be a part of something like that."

Becky said sure, and her coworker joined her that Sunday.

The next week person after person came up to Becky to tell her that they'd heard how great her church was.

The following Sunday Becky had an entire row of coworkers with her.

Being guerrilla is contagious, and that's what we are.

We're guerrilla lovers.

We practice guerrilla lovefare.

It's Time to Talk Guerrilla

Most of the chapters from now on will end with a list of questions. They can help you to dive deeper into and apply the ideas in the chapter, or, even better, you can use them to generate discussion with a group of your friends. Some of

the questions will be based on short Bible passages. So if you don't have a Bible, um, well, maybe you should go get one.

1. How did you feel after reading the story about Becky?
2. What struck you most about that story? Was it (a) how easy it was to make someone's day, (b) that the garbage truck driver had never had anyone show him that kind of love, (c) how it made Becky feel to engage in guerrilla love, (d) the reaction of her coworkers, or (e) something else?
3. This chapter mentioned that Christianity grew exponentially in the early years through Christians loving people beyond reason in the face of two horrible plagues. What kind of plagues exist today that Christians can love people through? How could you personally do this?
4. Read Ephesians 2:4–10. The passage begins by mentioning God's love toward us, his grace toward us, and his kindness toward us. It is because of God's love, grace, and kindness that he sent Jesus and we can now be made alive in him. How are you doing at accepting and applying God's love, grace, and kindness in your life?
5. The passage then says that we are not saved by our good works, but once we have allowed Jesus to save us, we are to do good works. Why do you think so many people get the order confused and try to do good works to earn God's favor, rather than doing them as a grateful response to God's favor?
6. Verse 10 says that God has good works "prepared in advance for us to do." Have you ever thought about the fact that as you go through your day, God has already planned out good works he'd like for you to do? How might having that mind-set change the way you live?
7. The passage says that we are God's "workmanship." The word translated *workmanship* can also be translated as *poetry*. The idea is that God is an artist who wants to make something beautiful out of our lives.

How do you think really accepting God's love into our lives and then giving it away in acts of guerrilla love could make our lives into something beautiful?

8. What do you think God might be trying to say to you through this chapter and these questions? What will you do about it?

It's Time to Get Guerrilla

From here on out the chapters will end not only with questions but also with a challenge to apply what you have read. Ingesting the ideas in this book is not enough; you need to use them, to live them out. It's time to get guerrilla.

Our goal is to become guerrilla lovers. That should become our identity and the normal way we live life. But sometimes we need help getting started with something new to us. I gave my church mandatory guerrilla lover assignments to get people started. Here are a few for you. Choose one and do it in the next 48 hours.

1. Bring in something special for your kid's teacher.
2. Write a thank-you note to someone who has influenced your life.
3. Serve hot coffee in front of an office building in the morning as people come in for work.
4. Bring a \$20 tip to the kitchen of a restaurant and give it to the dishwasher.
5. Give a plate of cookies to a city worker (garbage collector, police officer, firefighter, or postal worker).
6. Mow your neighbor's lawn or wash their car.
7. Send a care package to someone in the military, a college student, or someone in prison who you know and suspect doesn't receive care packages.
8. Go to a restaurant and pay for someone else's meal.