



# POWER *for* LIVING

September 1, 2019 I Can Do All Things Through Christ



# On Fire for Jesus

# Faith to the Rescue



BY BETH J. LUEDERS

**W**ildfires. Hurricanes. Terrorist attacks. You name any number of major disasters in the United States since 1970 and chances are Rick Barton has been on the scene as a first responder or a member of disaster response teams.

As a wildland firefighter who has battled blazes for the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and other government agencies for 50 years, Rick can share dozens of stories when extreme danger and sometimes death gained the

edge. He's faced national-headline wildfires roaring through the West, torching acre after acre of parched chaparral, timber-dry forests, and thousands of homes and structures. In 2018 between January and September alone, nearly 47,000 wildfires burned across the country, and Rick was involved in suppressing a number of them.

At six-foot-four inches, Rick stands steady serving in a number of roles for the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Interior. His career began when he joined a Forest Service trail crew right out of high school. Today, as a Line Safety Officer,



COVER PHOTO AND PHOTO AT LEFT COURTESY OF BETH J. LUEDERS

crew boss 28 days, and I was really lonely for fellowship. So I found one other Christian and only had five minutes to spend with him,” Rick recalls. “Then one of my crew accepted Christ. It really hit me that there’s got to be other Christians out here who feel the same way I do.”

The next year, Rick started an informal chapel service during lunch break on a fire in northwest Colorado. He invited his fellow firefighters to join him for a church service at a nearby rock. In his three decades of leading firefighter worship services in all kinds of harsh conditions, only twice did no one show up. “And one time, a guy comes up to me later and says, ‘I should have come. I was embarrassed,’” Rick says. “This firefighter then ended up starting a Bible study.”

In 1998, Rick became a member of the Fellowship of Christian Firefighters International (FCFI) and has helped with the ministry’s outreach to urban and wildland firefighters and first responders nationwide and abroad. Rick wears the FCFI patch on his fire shirt and readily gives away firefighter/first responder-themed New Testaments sponsored by FCFI.

After Hurricane Ivan ripped apart Florida, Alabama, the Gulf Shores, and more southeast regions, Rick led chapel services by flashlight at a naval air station that had no power. “Every night they wanted to have a church service, just seven or eight of us, FEMA workers primarily,” Rick recalls. “By flashlight, we’d read from our small Bibles, pray together, and sing a song.”

he’s on the fire line with the crews for 16 hours a day, ensuring the crews are not left in unsafe positions. When he’s on duty as Strike Team Leader, Rick is in charge of up to six to eight engines and crews on a fire. Also, through his work as a public information officer, he assists communications with communities and the media.

But perhaps Rick’s highest calling is unofficial chaplain on wildland fires and other disasters, counseling with crew members, praying with distraught survivors, and leading impromptu chapel services.

“In 1987, I was in California as a



**Rick sings for a rodeo worship service**

Over and over, disaster after disaster, Rick has put aside his own fear of being misunderstood or rejected for his faith so he can boost the faith of others. Rick served as a counselor at Ground Zero after the 9/11 attacks. After the 2003 Columbia Space Shuttle disaster, Rick joined a team who combed the debris path across the thick Texas brush, trudging six feet apart, spotting and tagging parts of the shuttle and personal effects from the doomed craft. Rick led a chapel service in a tent during the recovery project and more than 25 firefighters joined in. “Just as great,” Rick says, “another 15 or so ‘hung out’ at the edges of the tent watching and listening in. This second group is something that happens at every service I hold. Those who are curious are drawn to the perimeter.”

Drawing people to the perimeter



**Rick and Melva team up well in marriage and ministry**

and closer to God's heart has been foundational for Rick since his earliest days as a new Christian at Western State College. On fire for Jesus even back then as a sophomore in 1969, Rick started a Christian coffeehouse on campus, playing guitar and vocalizing. The coffeehouse ministry attracted Melva, a student from Hawaii, who put her faith in Jesus and started singing with Rick. Rick and Melva married in June 1971 and continued living and ministering in community.

The coffeehouse flourished into a Bible study and then into a church. Rick pastored for 20 years before transitioning into an itinerant evangelistic preacher and helping plant churches in nearby communities. Wherever they travel for about 10 weeks a year, the Bartons still harmonize together for appreciative audiences.



Community folks are grateful for Rick and his firefighter team saving their lives and property

Rick and Melva have four children—Joy, Rebekah, Steve, and Tim—and five grandchildren. Between Rick’s firefighting in the summers and ski instructing at local slopes in the winter, Rick credits Melva, a substitute teacher, with raising the kids when he was gone, especially when he was on fire assignments which could last two weeks at a time. Rick jokes of his bride of 48 years, “I told Melva she came halfway around the world to meet the perfect husband. She wonders where he went!”

Fighting fires in the summer, Rick studied business administration over 16 years and finished his degree in 1983. “The ministry just kept growing, so I dropped out of classes before I flunked out,” Rick says with a lighthearted chuckle. In between firefighting and ski instructing, he earned a Master of Arts degree

in evangelism from Wheaton College, a master of divinity at Denver Seminary, and a doctorate in evangelism and church growth at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Rick has also served as a consultant for the Billy Graham Advanced School of Evangelism and was asked by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association to write a handbook for beginning evangelists. Over their nearly half a century of ministering together, Rick and Melva have been honored to see more than 300 people they have influenced go into Christian service.

Whether Rick is protecting his crew from falling trees and flames raging out of control, or consoling a family after losing their home in an inferno, Rick brings his rock-solid faith into all of his decisions and conversations.



### A water bucket drop on Montana's Rat Creek wildland fire

While serving on two Hurricane Katrina relief details in Mississippi, Rick came across Lakeshore Baptist Church in Bay St. Louis. Katrina had decimated a massive swath of homes and businesses including the sanctuary of this indomitable church—only their steeple remained, propped up in the parking lot atop splintered remnants of their building.

“But, to my amazement, the church members had set up tables and were serving food and clothing to their neighbors,” Rick explains. “And, when our wildland firefighters were withdrawn after eight weeks, guess who volunteered to man our food, water, and ice distribution station?”

In his five decades of coming to the rescue of thousands of Americans across the country, Rick, 70, is still energized by playing a role in the rescue of hearts and souls. Take, for instance, a fire chief—we’ll call him James—Rick met while leading a revival service in the man’s town. James had gone through a series of difficult experiences, including an affair, divorce, and terminal cancer, and had not attended church in 40 years. Later he admitted that he only showed up to hear Rick speak because he was a firefighter. Rick stayed in touch, and within the year, the fire chief turned his own life over to the Christ.

“I got to help him come to the Savior about three days before he went to heaven,” Rick shares. “I led his funeral for about 1,500 firefighters, emergency personnel, and police officers. We’ve got to take the gospel to people. They are ready. But we have to be brave enough.”

In inspiring other Christians to be brave in their own faith and to stand alongside firefighters and first responders, Rick shares this advice. “Number one, every time you hear a siren or hear a story of a fire, pray. And pray for policemen as well,” Rick stresses. “Number two, whenever you see someone in their fire or police uniform, go over to them and say, ‘Thank you.’”

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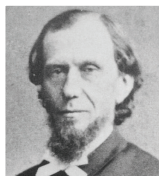
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# GOD'S GIFT TO EVERY BELIEVER

Andrew Murray

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." – John 4:13–14 NIV



Christ gives His Spirit, who calms the mind like a refreshing breeze of wind. He gives that strength which lifts the

hands that hang down and strengthens the feeble knees.

Christ gives to those who come to Him such comfort and pleasure as are enough to make them forget all of their former labor and travail. A little of true peace, a little of the joys of the manifested love of Christ, and a little of the true and holy hope of eternal life are enough to compensate for all that toil and weariness, and to erase the remembrance of it from the mind. That peace, which results from

true faith, passes understanding; that joy is joy unspeakable. There is something peculiarly sweet and refreshing in this joy that is not in other joys. What can more effectually encourage the mind, or give a more rational ground of rejoicing, than a prospect of eternal glory in the enjoyment of God from God's own promise in Christ?

## Reflection

How has your relationship with Christ impacted your life or that of people you know? Do you allow Christ's gifts to permeate your heart and mind so they overflow from your life? What does the Holy Spirit long to do for you?

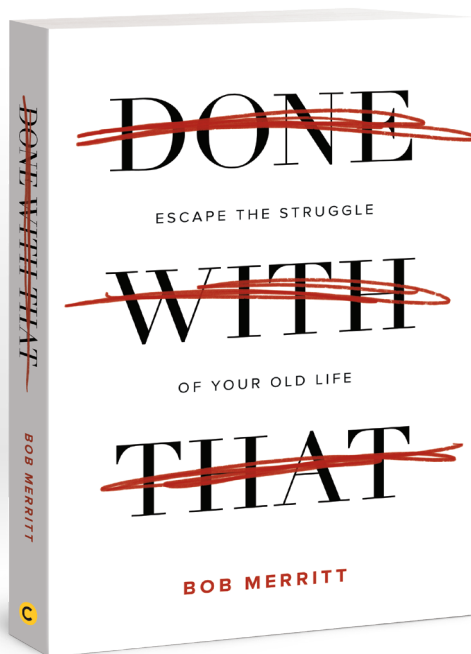
**Andrew Murray (1828–1917)**, was one of the most revered ministers and writers of his day. He spent his life calling believers to uncompromising holiness, reliance on the Holy Spirit, and an ever-deepening relationship with the heavenly Father. Taken from *The Best of Andrew Murray: 120 Daily Devotions to Nurture Your Spirit and Refresh Your Soul*. © 2005 by David C Cook.

## DAILY BIBLE READINGS

SUNDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Revelation 6–7
MONDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Revelation 8–9
TUESDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Revelation 10–11
WEDNESDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Revelation 12–14
THURSDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Revelation 15–17
FRIDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Revelation 18–19
SATURDAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	Revelation 20



# IF I HAVE A **NEW LIFE** IN CHRIST, WHY DO I STILL SAY AND DO THE SAME **OLD** THINGS?



The Bible says the old life is gone and the new life has come. But we still sin; still get angry, arrogant, and greedy. In ***Done with That***, Pastor Bob Merritt exposes the inner battle we all fight with sin. He exposes the cycle of failure and loss and shows readers that no matter how many setbacks they've experienced, there is a way to enjoy a new and better life in Christ.

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