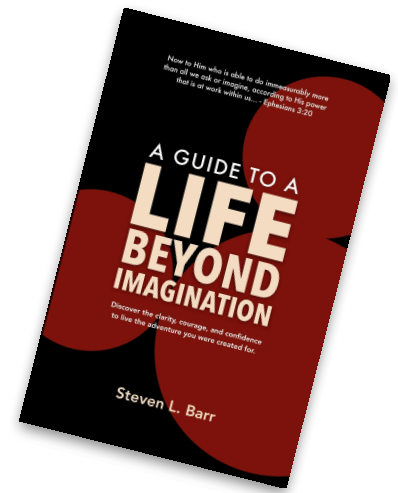


## CHAPTER ONE: THE BEST IS YET TO COME



You could tell it would be a very warm day at Walt Disney World, but no one seemed to mind. Standing just outside Magic Kingdom, the crowd swelled in anticipation as the clock atop the train station edged closer to 9 a.m. That's when all of the waiting guests would be invited to pass through the tunnels underneath the train station to enter "the happiest place on earth."

I positioned myself on the edge of the crowd, not far from the big circular flower bed sloping down from the train station. The perfect combination of flora created the face of Mickey Mouse. I was there to meet friends. "Floral Mickey"—as it is affectionately called—was a great location to make the connection. As I waited, I passed the time by watching the crowd. Smiles abounded. Giggles and squeals came from every direction. Anticipation stirred in the air.

Close to Floral Mickey, I noticed a particular little boy. He could not have been more than four or five years old. He wore a T-shirt with Buzz Lightyear soaring across his chest. Both of his parents wore "First Visit" buttons, so I knew this was going to be a memorable and special day for all of them.

I watched this little boy, whose name happened to be Nicholas, bounce around his mom and dad like a yo-yo. He'd run a few feet from them, see something, and run back to tell them what he had seen.

"Mommy, look at the flowers!" "Yes, Nicholas. Those are pretty."

He saw a boy with Goofy on his shirt. "Daddy, that boy has Goofy on his shirt." "Yes, Nicholas. That's Goofy alright." "Daddy, will I get to see Goofy?"

"We'll do our best, Nicholas."

For the next ten minutes, Nicholas recounted to his parents every single sight, sound, and smell that surrounded him.

"Mommy, is that popcorn? Can I have some?" "Maybe later, Nicholas. Maybe later."

Nicholas' questions were suddenly interrupted by a loud train whistle. The moment the crowd waited for was almost here. His parents pulled him close and pointed up to the train station. The courtyard erupted with music as the train steamed into the station. The crowd cheered and Nicholas' eyes and mouth widened in amazement as he recognized the passengers on the slowing train. Disney characters and princesses disembarked, smiling and waving to the cheering crowd below while singing a song of welcome. The characters had come to formally open Magic Kingdom and invite the waiting crowd into their magical domain.

Nicholas couldn't contain his excitement. "Mommy, there's Mickey!"

"Yes, Nicholas. There's Mickey." "Daddy, there's Donald!" "There he is, Nicholas."

For the entire duration of the happy welcome song, Nicholas identified every character who danced and sang from the station platform. Nicholas exploded with joy. As I watched, I chuckled inwardly. I could tell his parents knew they were in for quite a day.

Finally, Mickey officially declared Magic Kingdom as open for the day and the crowds began to move forward beneath the train station and into the park. Nicholas paused and looked upward at the characters as they re-boarded the soon departing train. He sighed as he watched them pull away and out of sight.

Looking up at both of his parents he said, "That was fun! Can we go home now?"

His parents glanced at each other and smiled. They each took one of Nicholas' hands into theirs and began walking toward the entrance. As they walked away, I could hear his dad say something I will long remember:

"Oh no, the best is yet to come."

With those words, Nicholas and his parents disappeared beneath the train station into a world I knew would be tucked in his memory for the rest of his life.

I could only imagine the look on Nicholas' face as he saw Magic Kingdom for the first time. I'm sure his world was forever changed. He would never think of Disney the same way again.

Up to that moment, Nicholas had no clue what adventure lay waiting for him just beyond his expectations. Before he entered, all he knew of Magic Kingdom was a train, a few characters, and a welcome song. He had no idea the real adventure was waiting!

Nicholas was young, innocent, and certainly naive when it came to his understanding of what Walt Disney World was all about. Maybe his parents had never told him about the

attractions, shows, food, or anything else on the other side of the train station. Maybe they did but his young mind simply wasn't able to form a picture of what it would be like.

For whatever reason, little Nicholas would've been content to go home having never experienced the breadth and width of Magic Kingdom. He could have left believing he saw all there was to see.

Nicholas made a permanent impression on me that day. The more I pondered that moment, the more I believe God gave me a parable for my life and yours.

As followers of Jesus, what if we are settling for less than what God offers? Jesus teaches over-and-over-and-over what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. He gives us numerous examples to describe it. But, maybe like Nicholas, we've never really understood the implications. We arrive at the gates and get excited about the characters from our favorite stories. But when the show is over and the music ends, we are ready to go home.

Christ invites us into His Kingdom. He isn't content to lead us to the entrance to observe a few stories and leave us there—outside of the adventure. There's a great quest to be discovered. We cannot experience all that has been prepared for us if we are not willing to move beyond our limited expectations and step into the adventure He offers.

However, if you are willing, I can assure you the best is yet to come!

I hope you enjoyed this sample chapter of my book. It is my deepest desire to help you live a life beyond anything you could possibly imagine. I know that God wants you to have that kind of life. That is why I wrote this book. I know that it is impossible to live a life beyond imagination apart from Him. I want you to be able to hear Him so clearly that there is no mistaking His voice. I want you to follow Jesus so courageously that you'll be able to move past any obstacle that works against you. I want you to keep moving forward so confidently that others are drawn into your adventure and want to experience God for themselves. If this chapter has inspired you, then I encourage you to purchase the book and embrace the rest of the adventure ahead. Because I know the best really is yet to come. -SLB