

“I love the way Ron looks at himself, and thus the world, through refreshingly honest self-talk, and then dialogues with me, the reader, with a full amount of caffeinated energy. The book is evidence that humor, honesty, and introspection have all the makings for a great read—a great read that helps us to be more authentic as we engage in our own extended journey on the java trail of life.”

—RON KUEST, soul-mentor, coach, and coauthor of *Gravity: Seven Essential Truths About Influence, Leadership, and Your Soul*

“Brace yourself for a fresh perspective on faith—an upgrade on the ways we Christians interact with the world. Biblical? Check. Humble? Check. Global? Refreshingly so. Like an ordained barista, DeMiglio serves nothing but the steaming hot truth with a dollop of dry wit and some freshly baked tales. Are you ready to engage with Jesus in all the places coffee grows or gets sold? Grab a mug. The first sips may be slightly disorienting but you’ll line up for refills, I promise you.”

—LORI STANLEY ROELEVELD, blogger, coffee-lover, and author of *Jesus and the Beanstalk*, *Running from a Crazy Man*, and *Red Pen Redemption*

“Buckle your seat belt and prepare to see the world with Ron DeMiglio. Meet people, taste the coffee, and be ready for the last sip that causes you to shun common thinking. Each chapter is a tour stop in a new city in this travel adventure of discovery, where Ron’s humor is a spoonful of sugar to help the wisdom go down.”

—MARTY FOLSOM, executive director of the Pacific Association for Theological Studies

“To say DeMiglio stirs an oversize pot and chuckles while he does it is an understatement. At the same time, his challenging, inspiring, sobering, sometimes irritating (because he strikes so close to home), and laugh-out-loud stories will—without question—change your life in profound ways. Highly recommended.”

—JAMES L. RUBART, best-selling author of *The Five Times I Met Myself*

“Coffee, The World, and Jesus, but Not Necessarily in That Order is a delightful and whimsical journey around the world and into your heart. DeMiglio’s quick wit and snappy style give the reader a lighthearted view of the business of coffee with a profound global perspective from the Jesus-loving heart of a regular ‘cup of joe’ kind of guy.”

—TROY VANHORN, missionary entrepreneur and coffee geek



COFFEE

THE
World
and

JESUS

BUT NOT NECESSARILY
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Ron DeMiglio

Coffee, the World, and Jesus, but Not Necessarily in That Order

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*This book is dedicated to my wife, Tina.
After all these years, after all our adventures, after raising
children, after making money and going broke, after all the
laughs, tears, missteps, and victories, I still get butterflies when I
hold your hand. You make me feel capable.*

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Introduction

A-Parrot-ly, It's Not About Me

For the past twenty-five years, my life, in one way or another, has been about coffee—buying, selling, roasting, serving, and loving coffee. Most of those years were spent working in the international coffee industry. Coffee has taken me quite literally all over the world. I not only love the taste and smell of coffee (roasted coffee, that is; green coffee smells like wet hay) but I also love the business of coffee, I love the people of coffee.

This is not, however, a book about coffee. It's a book about a Jesus-following peddler of that golden arabica elixir and how other worldviews, peoples, and cultures transformed my faith—one cup, one country, and one person at a time.

A Cagey Tactic

If all this makes me sound like some kind of a world-wise exotic traveler, talk to my friends and family. They'll set the record straight.

I'm just a guy. A guy who has been blessed with the privilege of making a living in the coffee industry while traveling the world.

I didn't always have this balanced of a perspective. In the beginning of my career, I thought I was a pretty big wheel of cheese. I covered up my walk of pride by deflecting compliments and feigning embarrassment at accolades. But inside I sucked them in like a black hole.

Maddeningly it seemed like every time I opted to relax, revel, and bask in the glow of the creature-length film that was my life, Jesus started kicking the back of my seat. *Thump!* "You are mine." *Thump!* "I love you." *Thump!* "Hear my call." *Thump!* "I've got much more for you." *Thump!* "That soda will weaken your bone density." (The last one might have been my wife prayerfully tilling the me-dirt. But the other kicks were definitely Jesus.)

That man is truly relentless.

I recall an event that, for me, highlighted just how persistent Jesus has been in my life. It was on my second trip to Japan that I was scheduled to meet with a prestigious trading company in downtown Tokyo. I sported a new suit and an old attitude. I had my international businessman savvy ratcheted up to industrial strength and I was a force to be reckoned with, or so I thought. Smug and cocky, I was not the least bit prepared for Jesus to interject himself again.

I had memorized a few social graces in Japanese on my flight over the Pacific. I was really going to wow these guys. They wouldn't know what hit them. As I stepped off the elevator, a receptionist confirmed my appointment and invited me to sit in one of their lavish lobby chairs. Aside from the receptionist, I was the only one in the waiting area. Only the fortunate few got to sit in these chairs. Me. How big cheesy was I now!

As I waited, my eyes scanned the area. In the corner was a large, ornate birdcage that held a stunningly beautiful parrot. The parrot looked as regal and formidable as I felt at that moment. Motionless, the bird stared at me. Its colors were so vibrant, it almost didn't look real. It all felt so international and exclusive. I was in my element.

Then it happened.

Without warning the parrot rattled off three full sentences of flawless Japanese. Holy blazing beak, Batman! The parrot knew more Japanese than I did and its pronunciation was perfect.

My preening, puffy persona evaporated instantly. I sat there trying to reclaim my business swag but it was too late. God had effectively used a lobby parrot to snap me back to the knowledge that this wasn't about me at all. Never was about me. In an instant, I decreased (deflated really) so that God might increase. His void-filling assurance and peace were instantaneous.

To say I didn't see that coming would be an understatement. I was so used to Jesus's surprisingly pointy sandals in the small of my back that this event caught me totally off guard. Sometimes you just have to give it up to God—especially when he takes you by complete surprise. I smiled inside and tipped my metaphoric cap.

That incident was one of my wake-up calls. For the first time in a while, it startled me so much, I didn't hit the snooze button. There were a few more incidents that I'll cover in this book, but that event was the first serious step in my heart change.

Some people have asked if I feel silly for thinking that the God who created the universe took the time to concern himself with my attitude before my business meeting.

No. No, I do not.

He's God. It's what he's capable of and what he said he would do for me. He promised he would give me the desires of my heart. I believe he was just getting my heart right first so my desires could be right. I count on him holding me accountable at all times. It's unnerving, but by proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior, I've given him that latitude in my life.

At that moment, God was just being God.

A Hill of Beans

Over the years, God has used the most unexpected means of fostering perspective and humility in me and, with them, greater effectiveness for his kingdom. I want to share a little of what I've learned in some of the most lavish and destitute places on earth. Allow me to tell you how I've been shamed by the richest people I've met and inspired by the poorest—and vice versa. And all the while, I've been figuring out this whole Jesus, grace, mercy, love, and gospel thing.

I have grown in the places where coffee grows. I have flourished and failed in the rich social soil of the coffee-buying and -consuming regions of the world. And I don't feel the least bit out-there when it comes to acknowledging the means God has employed in keeping me on point.

Nothing about the God I serve is predictable or common. Spotting my Savior's hand in the obscure and trivial makes me feel uncommonly loved. So much so that I developed a two-word phrase that keeps me alert to the subtlety of God in my life. The phrase is "Shun Common." It keeps me mindful of his attentive, uncommon presence, so I've decided to end every chapter with the phrase. It's more for me than for you. But if you want to make it your own, no worries here, my friend. Isn't sharing fun?

Okay, I'm ready. Let's do this book thingy.

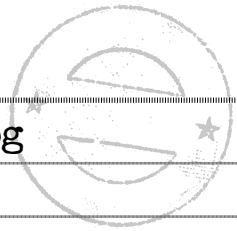
Join me on my coffee journey. Allow me to tell you what I learned and how my travels gave me the peripheral vision to get acquainted with a bigger Jesus than my American upbringing allowed—a Jesus that created coffee and loves the people of coffee even more than I do.

..... *Shun Common*

Chapter: A Distant Chili Dog

Location: Yokohama, Japan

Purpose: Scouting Coffee Shop Locations



Getting lost on foot in Yokohama, Japan, was disturbing.

I'd checked into my hotel and made my way to my room on the twenty-third floor. The view was spectacular and the sheer density of the region drew me in like jumbo shrimp at a wedding reception. As I scanned the city I spied the top half of a baseball stadium that looked closer than it really was. It had to be the home of the Yokohama BayStars. I didn't have anything to do for several hours so I put on comfy foot treads and hit the mean streets of Yokohama. Finding the stadium was simple, as the lobby staff pointed me in the general direction.

I walked around the entire baseball complex several times and took in the atmosphere of the historic baseball stadium. But after circling it I wasn't completely sure which street I had taken to get there. The streets all looked the same—narrow and jammed with buildings, people, and businesses.

The buildings were so tall and the streets so narrow that I couldn't get my bearings or see anything beyond my immediate location.

Blazing Trails and Annoying Strangers

Was I worried? Nah. Not me. I was Lewis and Clark! My Japanese was reasonable enough to figure out the path back.

Or so I thought.

This was different. I wasn't in a meeting with businesspeople who spoke some English. I was on the streets of Yokohama, not just out of my comfort zone but out of my comfort continent.

People on the street responded to my questions about getting back

to my hotel with a few quick hand gestures and verbal instructions that approached spin-cycle speed. It was exasperating and escalated my dislike of mimes. I can't explain why. It just did. They spoke so fast they might as well have been speaking Klingon. "Lewis and Clark" had just been exposed as "Clueless and Lark." The bits and pieces I could understand meant almost nothing to me. I had no clue where the landmarks were that they referenced.

I felt completely out of my element, yet everyone around me was in the center of theirs. It took me an hour and a half and involved enough distance to make even Forrest Gump pucker, but eventually I stumbled across my hotel again.

A Turf Warrior

My circuitous adventure that day poked its head into my consciousness door a short time later—but when it happened again, I was the one with the home field advantage.

My original business partner is Japanese. Over the past twenty-five years, I've been to Japan many times to see him, and he's been to the United States frequently. But since his last trip I had moved my office, so he needed new directions.

He called me from the airport the morning he arrived. We agreed to meet in a familiar place and then he'd follow me to my new office. I rattled off all the potential meeting sites I felt certain he would know.

He didn't know any of them.

So I rattled off a few of Seattle's major landmarks along the I-5 corridor and suggested we meet near one of them.

Didn't help.

His response was the same to every suggestion . . . silence followed by, "I don't know where that is."

Just before I suggested we resort to smoke signals from a dumpster fire, I said, "Is there any place in town that you *do* know?"

He was quiet for a moment then blurted out, "Yes! Yes! Weinerschnitzel!"

If you're not aware, Weinerschnitzel is a US chain of quick-serve hot-

dog restaurants. I happened to know the store he was talking about. But to say the location was obscure would be like saying that Neptune gets a little nippy once the sun goes down. He'd only been there twice in twenty-five years. How could he remember how to get to a little hot-dog joint when he couldn't figure out how to get to a navigable body of water?

Simple. He loved their chili dogs. So it became a familiar landmark to him. It was a reference point, a part of his vocabulary, a marker he understood.

What I thought were obvious landmarks meant nothing to him. Then it hit me like a ton of bok choy. (A ton is a ton, right?) I was selfishly enamored with my own reference points. They were the appropriate ones—the right ones—for my life, but not for my friend.

The first thing I should have asked was, “What place do you know how to get to?”

It never occurred to me to think about what might be a reference point for him and him alone. And what's easier? For him to find my landmarks, or for me—a lifelong Seattleite—to find his?

My Sunday Smooth

This whole reference-point thing feels strangely familiar. I confess, when I'm around unsaved folks, sometimes I feel like I'm in the middle of a foreign city where I don't speak the language. But at church? That's home. I've had Sundays where everything I utter to my fellow believers feels like pure gold. There's an ease to my rapport and nothing has ever felt more natural.

Then Monday rolls around. Emboldened after getting my Sunday smooth on, I decide to share Jesus with a stranger. Suddenly, every word I sputter seems as appropriate as telling a ten-year-old reading *Old Yeller* that the dog dies in the end.

A fictional conversation (but one I sometimes feel capable of): “Excuse me, sir, but are you aware that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life? Well . . . I'm not saying the plan you've devised for your own life is complete rubbish, but it wouldn't hurt to consider an alternative,

right? Sorry. That didn't come out right. Can I start over? Have you ever thought about where you'll go after you die? Really, you were just diagnosed with pancreatic cancer? You don't say. Huh. So this is a timely topic for you? Time out. That wasn't the response I was looking for. Why are your fists clenched? Oh, shoot. How forgetful of me. I had a poppy seed muffin for breakfast and I really need to floss. Let's catch up later. Bye!"

Everything I say sounds contrived, insensitive, and way out of place. What is it about sharing my faith with non-Christians that instantly turns me into the biggest shovelhead in the shed?

Maybe, just maybe, it might be as simple as realizing that when it comes to Christianity, nonbelievers might be standing on the befuddling streets of their own Yokohama—without a landmark in sight.

Who Hid the Heathen?

Maybe that's the crux of my Monday blunder. Maybe that's why I so often feel lost in Yokohama when sharing my faith.

My point of reference is always the cross. When talking and ministering to other Christians, I naturally share the same understanding of where to head. My point of reference doesn't, or at least shouldn't, change. The ultimate destination for almost every substantive conversation, concern, or solution always ends at the foot of the cross. But when I engage the unsaved, they naturally share no such understanding or reference point.

If I want my words and actions to impact a nonbeliever, I need to consider the other person first. (Novel idea, huh?) Where are they spiritually? What do they know or not know? What do they believe or not believe? Where can I most effectively meet them in order to show the love of Christ? If I would simply ask questions and discover where their own personal landmarks are, amazing things can happen.

My words must cease to be limited to the catchphrase or fear-based arguments I've defaulted to in the past. You know the ones:

- Turn to Jesus or burn in hell—the Christian version of Stockholm syndrome

- God said it, I believe it, that settles it!—the all-purpose default balm that soothes any painful lapses in effort or logic
- Pascal's Wager—the idea, when you boil it down, that Christianity might be a waste of time, but it can't hurt!

Don't get all highbrow on me.

The Roman's Road? The four spiritual laws? Admit it! You've either used them or have at least considered using them as you picture your friends auto-falling to their knees in the wake of your brilliant verbal snippet or lovingly compelling point. I've done it all too often!

Amazingly, when I've taken the time to meet others where they are and talk about what they know, the cross is always visible. I've never needed to do anything more than engage people in normal, value-extending conversation.

It's really that simple.

I don't need to force the issue. When I've met people where they are, the conversation suddenly feels natural and easy. I've had completely ordained conversations with people that wore more leather than a cow or had more ink in their skin than an octopus. I've bantered with and befriended people so unlike myself that, at first, it made them suspicious. I've talked about life with tough guys who were bigger than my first apartment as well as the painfully shy among us.

I once struck up a conversation with a legless man in a wheelchair who was menacingly eyeing people from the entrance of an alley. As I approached him, the smell of alcohol, body odor, and urine hit me like a giant stink-hammer. I knelt beside him and asked if there was any way that I could serve him. His facial expression softened immediately as he asked me if I could reposition his pillow and help him sit more upright because his back was hurting. I did, and the cross made an appearance.

Like atomic clockwork, I can count on it.

A nonbeliever may only know where to find a chili dog. So what? Meet them there with me. To be perfectly frank, I need to love the unsaved enough to meet them in their own ballpark. (Sorry, couldn't resist a couple of hot-dog puns.) Then my words will have real substance and effect.

I don't increase my odds of being heard by dragging people onto my own reference turf. I'll never find the people who really need to hear about Christ by only frequenting my boardroom comfort zones.

Go Fetch the Rest

Jesus didn't shy away from unfamiliar streets. He sought out and ministered to the adulterous woman at the well. We don't have community wells anymore, so spend some time at the local watering hole, park, transit center, coffee shop, smoke shop, or hot-dog stand. Discover where the marginalized and forgotten hang out in your community. Go get uncomfortable for Jesus. Maybe find a bar and join a darts league, hand out ice-cold water or soda at a skate park, go play checkers with a forgotten someone at a nursing home, or dress up like a Christmas tree and stand in the middle of a public library just to thumb your nose at "the man."

Ignore that last one, please—although I've personally considered doing it.

Sure, I might periodically feel as out of place as a NASCAR sticker on a Prius as I rationally discuss the sanctity of my marriage with a lifelong gay friend. Yep, that happened. That's okay. I need to get used to it. The Bible tells me that I can be different and still emit light and fit in.

Wanna join me?

Knew you did. Cool. Let's find the chili dog in the lives of the lost and hurting. I'm pretty sure it won't ruin my church cred to Weinerschnitzel it now and then.

..... *Shun Common*