

The Story of Max Lucado

Max Lucado was raised in the small town of Andrews, which he describes as “summers skillet-hot and winters wind-tunnel cold, populated by friendly people, pump jacks, windmills, and cattle on treeless prairies.” His father, Jack, was a hobo during the Great Depression, but after a few wild and rowdy years, he settled as an oil field mechanic. Max’s mother, Thelma, was a nurse and worked in the cotton fields before marrying and having four children, with Max as the youngest. Max says his parents instilled strong values in their children – moral behavior and hard work – values he initially rebelled against.

Like many in West Texas, Max’s family was in church anytime the doors were open. But during his teenage years, he decided to leave behind many of the moralistic teachings of his parents and his church. When he was 16, he spent the hot Texas summer digging ditches for oil field pipelines. Max started acting like the older men he worked with – drinking beer and chasing girls. Then, while he was chugging six packs with a buddy on the hood of a car and watching stars in the West Texas sky, he began to wonder if there was more to life than what he was doing. His question started him on his journey to know more about God. “But I didn’t think a relationship with God was the solution,” he says. “I thought the solution might be a good career, or getting into politics or social concerns.”

His parents offered to pay for Max to attend a church-sponsored school near Andrews called Abilene Christian University. He took up their offer and decided to put his energies into becoming a lawyer. As a freshman, Max was still a “reckless character,” smoking, drinking and partying. But a required Bible course during his sophomore year changed the course of Max’s life. He was fascinated with the professor’s portrayal of Jesus, and he was convinced he wanted to be a follower. “Maybe this is why I write about Jesus so much,” says Lucado. “He forgives what I did then, and what I do now.”

Then a mission trip to Brazil during his junior year solidified Max’s change of heart – no longer did he want to be in law, he wanted to be a missionary. To go back to Brazil full-time, Max needed a graduate degree in theology and two years of experience as a pastor. So he stayed at ACU to earn the advanced degree and then moved to Miami to accept a pastoral position. It was there he found two lifelong loves. As associate minister, he was responsible for writing a column for the church’s newsletter. He discovered that he loved the writing and rewriting required to paint the pictures and tell the stories in his mind. Those columns eventually became his first book, *On the Anvil* (Tyndale House, 1985). The other new love? Denalyn Preston, another recent ACU graduate who had moved to Miami to teach. They were married in 1981.

After two years of marriage, Max and Denalyn moved to Rio de Janeiro as missionaries to start churches with Brazilians. But the Lucados were not an overnight success. Most church events were greeted with low interest and even lower attendance. It was then that Max started to realize for himself what has become the core of every book he has written—God’s boundless grace. Says Max: “I discovered you teach the grace you

experience. If I didn't let God forgive me, then inadvertently, I knew I would teach a conditional grace. If I felt forgiven, there would be a joyful grace." Max and the mission team went on to start three other successful, thriving churches in Brazil. "Brazil did a lot more for me than I did for Brazil," says Max. "When a person comes to the end of himself, he begins to find God."

With his preaching in full swing in Brazil, and his collection of sermon notes growing, Max decided to see if his writings could be published. On a lark, he re-worked the newsletter columns from his Miami days into a manuscript, mailing it to fifteen publishers. After rejection letters from 14 publishers, *On the Anvil* was picked up by Tyndale House and published in 1985.

In 1987 Max's father died of Lou Gehrig's disease. Max knew it was time, after five years in Brazil, to bring his wife and young daughters home to be closer to his mother. In 1988, Lucado was hired to be the minister at Oak Hills Church of Christ in San Antonio, Texas. In the states, his writing career began to flourish. Almost two decades later, Max is now one of the most recognized inspirational authors in the U.S., second only to Billy Graham, with more than 50 million books in print. Max has written more than 50 titles published in more than 20 languages worldwide.

Christianity Today magazine recently dubbed him "America's Pastor." Publishers Weekly, the general market publication for books and bookselling, recently proclaimed "there aren't many authors bigger than Lucado." In 2005, Reader's Digest called him "America's Best Preacher." His books are regular fixtures on national bestseller lists including The New York Times, USA Today, Publishers Weekly and the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA). In addition to having over 50 million books in print, both adult and childrens' titles, Lucado's words have also been published into a wide array of products including a highly successful gift card line from Hallmark/Dayspring.

All this publishing success has drawn more than a little attention to a previously low-profile Texas author and minister. Lucado has been featured in a wide range of media, including USA Today, "Larry King Live" and "NBC Nightly News." He has spoken at the National Prayer Breakfast before the President of the United States. He has traveled with internationally-renowned musicians as the special speaker on their music tours, such as the highly-successful "Come Together & Worship Tour" (sponsored by Chevrolet) with Grammy-Award winning artists Michael W. Smith and Third Day.

But overshadowing this publishing success, Max is astonished by the greater gifts God has given him: a one-in-a-million wife (Denalyn) and three unbelievable daughters (Jenna, Andrea, and Sara).

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