

This is the introduction to *Chasing Rich: Stories of Men, Miracles, and the God Among Us* by Nicholas Schwartz, with substantive editing by Ken Walker. Released Aug. 18, 2026, by Loudon Place Publishing.

INTRODUCTION

The Backwards Man

I still recall my first glimpse of Rich. The wheels of my car came to a screeching halt at the intersection of Atlantic and Station Plaza, just beyond the Stamford train station. I would like to add juicy sensory details like “the smell of burnt rubber” or “fine droplets of sweat cascading from my brow”; but if I’m being honest, it all happened so fast.

With a new job came a new commute and a corner of Connecticut that was completely unfamiliar. By the time I saw Rich’s shadowy figure approaching out of the corner of my eye, there was no other option but to slam on the brakes and yank the steering wheel hard to the right. When I came to a full stop, I could feel my heart pumping and thoughts racing: *What is this man thinking? He just walked head down into oncoming traffic at the busiest intersection in the city!* I kicked the driver’s side door open and quickly stepped out into the street.

Whether by divine intervention or dumb luck, my car’s front end missed Rich by a mere arm’s length. Imagine that. Three extra feet and I would be writing his eulogy from a jail cell right now. The strange thing is, he seemed entirely unfazed by the situation. He wore no fear on his face, no expression of shock, not even the courtesy of a one-finger salute. In fact, by the time I got a good look at him, Rich had effortlessly strolled to the other side of the road, like he was operating on a frequency the rest of us couldn’t tune into. As the seconds passed and the distance between us grew, I couldn’t help but study him in complete disbelief. Who could walk away from nearly getting hit by a car and show no reaction at all? In that moment, I couldn’t provide an answer, but one thing was certain—an image of Rich was now forever etched in my mind.

No more than five feet, six inches tall, Rich wasn’t a big guy by any means. He possessed dark features and disheveled hair just above an overgrown, patchy beard. He carried a green bag draped over his shoulder; its contents were a mystery. But given the many stains, rips, and missing zippers, it is safe to say that bag had journeyed through hell and back. Rich also wore an oversized winter coat. Over time, I would discover that was always the case, rain or shine. The pockets overflowed with plastic soda bottles and half-eaten snacks, so much so that a piece of food had fallen out and taken up residence in the middle of the intersection. Initially, this incredible stockpile struck me as a bit odd. Then again, if you’re homeless, nothing gets wasted.

Despite his ruffled appearance, it wasn’t until Rich walked away that I found myself truly surprised. Head cocked over his shoulder like the periscope of a submarine, Rich walked backwards. At first, I figured it was some strange game or ploy for attention. Maybe he wanted a good long look at the man who had almost flattened him. As it turned out, neither was true. Whether traveling five miles to the grocery store or fifty yards across a busy intersection, I learned that Rich always walked backwards. If he was on foot, he was in reverse.

As I shared this incident with a couple of coworkers later that afternoon, I learned that Rich had been a well-known figure in Stamford for quite some time. He was famously known as the “Backwards Man,” a nickname surrounded by local folklore. Despite the intriguing stories circulating about him, I wasn’t particularly interested in the nickname or the mysterious tales. Within ten seconds of our encounter, I felt an undeniable curiosity. A hook had been set. I wanted to uncover the truth: what was his real name? And what was his story?

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In the years that followed our near-miss on that busy stretch of roadway, Rich and I became good friends. We eventually moved past the incident, and somewhere along the way, Rich stopped being a stranger. It became common for us to grab lunch every couple of weeks during the middle of a workday. Rich would text “Food?” and I would reply, “Yup.”

For years, that was the status quo. Neither of us cared much for empty chatter, but that was the nature of our friendship. If it wasn’t honest or to the point, it didn’t need to be said. Naturally, our first conversations were punctuated by long stretches of silence. I think neither of us quite knew how to relate to the other. But as time passed and we found more common ground, those quiet moments slowly faded. He was no longer the “Backwards Man.” He was just Rich.

Our story together continues in a later chapter, but it is important to introduce him now. Without Rich, this book wouldn’t exist. After many years of shared meals and conversations, Rich and I sat down one last time. Unlike previous lunches—where we would sit, eat, chat, and then be on our way—something happened that neither of us could have anticipated. I’ve spent years trying to find the right words for what unfolded that afternoon. Miraculous is the best I’ve got.

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There’s something different about that word, *miracle*. Whether read in a book or overheard in a conversation, it grabs the full weight of our attention. It piques our curiosity like few other words. And somehow, strangely, there is little consensus around its meaning. Often it is defined differently from one person to the next, based on their religious views.

Take the scenario of a mother who finds the strength to free her son from beneath a two-thousand-pound Chevy. Is that adrenaline, coincidence, or divine intervention (i.e., God engaging in human affairs)? If you asked three different people, you might just get three different answers. For me, a miracle has to include a few things. It must be highly improbable, innately good, and believed to be orchestrated by God. As it relates to the story of Rich, what made it miraculous was not just that it was wonderfully precise and wonderfully profound. The story felt miraculous, because it felt like God had entered the room.

It was a moment that proved to be a turning point in my life. Not for what happened, but for the validation it provided. Rich’s story supported my belief that God was—and remains to this day—an *active* participant in my life. Not a casual bystander.

Many Christians crave proof but are afraid to make the request: “God, show me that you are here and that you are on my side.” What I used to claim—but now truly believe—is that the answer to that question is all around us. Sometimes it takes a practiced mindset to experience the proof. Other times the response is so vivid it practically knocks you off your feet. And that’s the beauty of miracles. Sacred or secular, they compel a response. People who have stopped

expecting anything suddenly find themselves paying attention. The catch is, once you've experienced one, do you attribute it to coincidence or divine providence?

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Shortly after that last meeting with Rich, I decided to track down more stories of God in action. These encounters are what I like to term: "God moments." For more than a year, I searched for accounts of miraculous happenings from men of different countries and cultures around the world. There was no magic formula, no blueprint. But I wanted to experience the same reassurance, so I went looking. I spoke with scientists and teachers, inmates and drug addicts, janitors and hedge fund managers, and one hulking lineman in the National Football League.

Most folks greeted me with a handshake and full transparency. Most people wanted their stories known. On other occasions, though, I met reluctance or confusion. Some acknowledged what had happened but were still processing it themselves. It didn't line up with the way they believed the world was supposed to work.

In either case, I documented the moment but also the meaning behind the moment. After all, what is it about miracles that are so alluring? Is it that they sometimes engage in the impossible? Or is it that they point to the one who can do the impossible? Two years of fieldwork and I would argue the latter. I adhere to the understanding of former Cambridge University physicist and Anglican priest John Polkinghorne:

Miracles are not to be interpreted as divine acts against the laws of nature (for those laws are themselves expressions of God's will) but as more profound revelations of the character of the divine relationship to creation. To be credible, miracles convey a deeper understanding than could have been obtained without them.¹

"Convey a deeper understanding." That right there is the meat and potatoes. Each miracle acts as a fingerprint, a unique identifier that helps us visualize the entire person. Half the battle is learning how to find the print: reorienting our senses to observe God's work. The second half is decoding it: deciphering the meaning that lies below the surface.

In sharing the stories I've gathered, my hope is that your image of God will grow clearer—that the more fingerprints you find, the easier it becomes to see who he is and the goodness of his character.

I have grouped these stories into five sections, each representing a pathway through which God steps into broken world: protection, guidance, transformation, healing, and joy. Admittedly, these pathways aren't exhaustive; I believe some of God's interactions remain mysterious and known only to Him. This collection is my attempt to simplify the dynamic between creator and creation, reflecting the simplicity I believe God intended for our relationship.

As *New York Times* best-selling author Bob Goff aptly put it, "Big faith doesn't need big words. We don't need to make faith easier, because it isn't. We need to make it simpler, because

¹ John Polkinghorne, *Science and Theology: An Introduction* (Fortress Press, 1998), 93.

it is.”² With this in mind, you won’t find deep theology here—just honest accounts of ordinary men wrapped up in extraordinary moments.

² “The Way He Sees You: Everybody Always by Bob Goff,” posted by Justin on December 16, 2018, <https://thewayheseesyou.wordpress.com/2018/12/16/everybody-always-by-bob-goff/>, accessed February 3, 2025.