

**Positively Dangerous** is indeed a dangerous book to read. Frank Mercadante brings together powerful stories, the Scriptures, and strategies in a positively dangerous combination that will leave the reader of any age ready to recommit to the ultimate adventure—extreme friendship with and faith in Jesus. With simple yet profound truths that are easy to read and, more importantly, difficult to dismiss, *Positively Dangerous* has informed and inspired my heart. It has challenged me to live as a more positively dangerous person! It will do the same for you!

—*Jesse Manibusan, musician, storyteller,  
perfectly imperfect friend of God*

*Positively*  
**Dangerous**  
Live Loud, Be Real,  
Change the World

Frank Mercadante

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# Dedication

I want to dedicate this book to my parents, Frank Sr. and Mary Mercadante, whose love and support have been a constant example to me. Your parental love has been nothing less than “positively dangerous.”

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# Introduction

Beware! This book is dangerous—positively dangerous! The following pages may change your life. This book is *positively* dangerous because if you apply the message to your life, it's "dangerous." You can be "positive" of that.

Additionally, the following pages are positively dangerous for others because if you apply what's written, you will live your faith in such a real, vibrant, and loud way that those around you will be in danger of catching it. Positively dangerous believers live their faith in an infectious, contagious manner.

If there is ever a time for an epidemic of faith to spread across our country, that time is now. Our world is spiritually starving and desperate for the hope of the Gospel. Who can better accomplish this feat than young believers? God has used youth in many ways throughout the centuries. We easily

forget that our Catholic Tradition is filled with childhood saints and adolescent martyrs who lived their faith with nothing less than heroism. Make no mistake about it—today's youth are capable of the same kind of world-changing impact. When young people apply their natural energy, enthusiasm, and idealism to living and spreading the Gospel, nothing can stand in their way. I hope you can use this book as a tool to this end in your life.

*Positively Dangerous* is not about hype as much as it is about depth. It's not about image as much as it is about substance. Dangerous persons of faith are able to extend the Kingdom of God to the world around them because such people have a living, vibrant, and deep relationship with Jesus Christ. Living loud isn't about raising the decibels of our words by out-shouting those around us. Words that ring with depth, even when uttered softly, will always rise above the shallow words of hype.

Becoming positively dangerous is not what you can *do* but what you can *be*. It's not about changing others as much as it is about changing yourself. You are the danger factor—your relationship with God and the way you conduct your life. Others are only vulnerable because you live and share your life in such a positive way that it becomes dangerously contagious.

Too often teens are offered "Christianity Lite," an expression of faith that tastes great on the surface but is less filling to the soul. Young people want more than that. Most teens want to make a difference in their world. They want to invest their life in a worthy adventure that has the potential to change their world. You have this book in your hands because you are the kind of teen God can use as a history changer.

You can read *Positively Dangerous* alone or use it in a group. Please take time to consider the questions for reflection and discussion at the end of each chapter. They are designed to help you integrate and apply the message of this book.

For the latest in becoming positively dangerous, visit the Cultivation Ministries Web site at [www.outbreak-of-faith.org](http://www.outbreak-of-faith.org).

## Chapter 1 **You Dangerous!**

David, a popular member of our peer ministry team, was having a great junior year. He was a well-respected leader, earned A's in school, and dated Nicole, a very attractive senior peer minister. However, David was not the only ministry team member interested in Nicole; so was Steven. As a matter of fact, Steven repeatedly badgered Nicole about her relationship with David. He didn't think they were right for each other, and he wasn't timid about sharing his opinion with David, Nicole, and anyone else who'd listen. David laughed off Steven's competitive remarks as jokes and his apparent attraction to Nicole as no real threat—until she suddenly broke off their relationship. To make matters worse, before the ink dried on David's "Dear John" letter, Steven asked Nicole to be his

date for their senior prom—and she accepted the invitation.

David didn't take this rebuff lightly. To say he was emotionally upset is a bit of an understatement. He felt he was in love with Nicole and was devastated by the breakup and the thought of her going hand in hand to the prom with that slimy, backstabbing Steven. His friends began to notice a change in David's disposition. He started to say and do things that were uncharacteristic of his personality. I figured he was only a novice in dealing with these new and intense feelings of love and was experiencing some emotional awkwardness. Others said it more starkly: "David has gone off the deep end!"

All three were on our peer ministry team, and before long the battle lines were drawn; everyone had an opinion on who was right or wrong in this teenage love triangle. Our team was falling apart, and I knew I had to intervene.

I gathered the three of them in my office in an attempt to facilitate some type of reconciliation and healing. As the meeting began, Steven and David exchanged verbal blows while Nicole, the object of their modern-day chivalry, sat awkwardly and in obvious discomfort. I mediated as best I could, repeatedly going two steps forward and three back, as the boys emotionally triggered each other. We were spared any uncontrolled shouting, but the personal, verbal jabs between David and Steven demonstrated the depths of their anger toward each other. As the heated discussion continued, the tension in the room mounted. Eventually, David said that he needed a break, and he asked to be excused for a moment to get something from his car. We all needed a breather, so I readily consented.

While David was gone, I started to wonder what he needed from his car. As my mind entertained all the possibilities, I kept trying to talk myself out of one crazy thought. David was obviously upset with Steven and emotionally devastated by the breakup. He had not been acting like himself lately, and I wondered what was running

through his mind. I had read stories in the paper about similar incidents where people had resorted to violent acts. Was David capable of this? I did not think so—he was one of my finest students. On the other hand, he was pretty upset and was already acting strangely. Good people do snap, I thought. I was startled out of my day-dream by David's returning to my office and shuffling to place an unknown object behind the door.

David then stood at the entrance, facing Steven, Nicole, and me. He did not proceed back to his chair but remained in the doorway, his hands behind his back. He was obviously concealing something! I swallowed hard as a jolt of adrenaline surged through my body. What is he hiding from us? I anxiously asked myself.

David began to address Steven with an introductory speech, the kind that precedes some type of momentous and memorable occasion—like the words people pronounce before giving an award, a wedding proposal, a prison sentence, or even an execution. In a nervous and quivering voice, David stated: "Steven, what you did to me was wrong, and I feel betrayed by you. You hurt me deeply by your negative words during the year, and now you've taken my girlfriend."

I craned my neck in a desperate attempt to catch a glimpse of what David held in his hands, but he had intentionally positioned himself so that no one could see what he was hiding. Steven and Nicole became visibly anxious, and I mentally prepared myself for the worst—in case David had concealed a knife or a gun behind his back. I was the closest to David, and as soon as I could identify a weapon in his hand, I was determined to pounce on him and save Steven from harm.

I will never forget what happened next. David finished his introductory speech and was about to initiate the action we all awaited. His hands started to move forward from behind his back. I visually locked in on his hands and moved into a position to tackle him. Sweat was

dripping down my face as I was nearing my "life or death" cue. When I caught sight of what David was holding, my jaw dropped. He held a small, scrunched-up hand towel. He proceeded to reach behind my door for the container of water he had concealed there, brought it forward, and knelt at Steven's feet. He then said, "Steven, I forgive you and want to wash your feet as a gesture of my forgiveness and reconciliation." David took off Steven's shoes and socks and washed his feet. The three of us were stunned and silent. When David finished, he embraced Steven and reaffirmed his forgiveness and his desire to be reconciled.

(Adapted from Frank Mercadante, *Growing Teen Disciples*, pp. 244–246)

David was one dangerous guy! But the situation did not (thank God) play out in the negative way I was anticipating. When David returned from his car, I sincerely believed he was concealing a weapon, and I considered him to be an extremely dangerous person. He seemingly had placed us all at risk, and I felt very unsafe. Fortunately, his "weapons" were a pitcher of water and a towel, wielded in love, which became instruments of healing rather than means of destruction. On that memorable day, I became the victim of David's living out his faith dangerously, and my life changed as a result.

Yes, David was dangerous, but he was *positively* dangerous. He had read the Gospel account where Jesus stoops to the ground in humility and, like the lowliest servant, washes the feet of Judas, a man about to betray him. But David hadn't just read the words as another nice Jesus story; instead, he had taken Jesus' words to heart (see John 13:14). David was serious about following Jesus. He reasoned, If that's what my Lord does with his "enemy," that's what I must do with my "enemy" to be a disciple of Christ. David's faith was real, and he actively applied it to his life's circumstances. His decision to follow Jesus instead of his bruised ego and wounded heart made him *positively* dangerous to all of us in that room and brought peace to a troubled peer ministry team.

## We Are All Dangerous

Most people do not view themselves as dangerous. If someone told you, “You pose a dangerous threat to others,” you would likely be offended. What does it mean to be dangerous? The dictionary defines *dangerous* as “unsafe, perilous, full of danger, exposed to possible risk, adventurous.” Some forms of danger we fear; others attract us.

News shows and newspapers remind us of danger’s negative presence in our daily life. We see danger’s most unattractive side in school shootings, gang violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and terrorism.

Strangely enough, though, we are attracted to danger’s adventurous side. A person involved in extreme sports is an example of someone who craves danger’s excitement. Because Hollywood producers also know that audiences ache for the thrill of danger, they use it to drive many movies and television shows. Danger sells. We are somehow tantalized by the risk and adventure that danger offers.

Danger can be both compelling and repulsive, but our Catholic faith is not something we normally associate with either of these aspects of danger. Going to church on Sunday is not dangerous. Reading the Scriptures doesn’t seem so dangerous, except for the occasional paper cuts we get when turning the pages. So what can be so dangerous about living our faith? The fact is that the way we live our faith not only places others at risk but also offers us a sense of adventure like nothing else in this world.

As unbelievable and even ironic as it may seem, *you* are already dangerous. Everyone who calls himself or herself Catholic or Christian is *already* dangerous. So the question isn’t “Are we dangerous?” That’s a given. The real question is “Are we positively dangerous or negatively dangerous?” Does the lively manner in which we live our faith place others at serious risk of catching our faith? Or does our lifeless, even contradictory, expression of faith give others a credible reason to reject our faith as irrelevant?

## Two Types of Dangerous Faith

We can live our faith in two ways: positively or negatively. If we are in love with Jesus and allow our faith to affect our actions, we have a positively dangerous faith and put others at risk of personally encountering Jesus. But if we are not in a vibrant relationship with Christ, and if our faith doesn’t affect how we act, we are negatively dangerous to others and can create barriers that prevent them from knowing Christ. The most dangerous threats to Christianity are *not* from the outside. The most significant menace is not from oppressive governments, terrorists, or skeptical atheists trying to disprove our faith. The most perilous threats usually originate from the inside—from us! The greatest challenge to Christianity is whether we, who profess to have faith in Christ, live out that faith in daily life.

## Weak Strains of Faith

All of us have received some type of vaccination against childhood diseases, such as measles, polio, or hepatitis B. Vaccines introduce a weak strain of the virus into our system to build antibodies that resist the illness in case of future exposure. In turn, our body becomes immune to the disease.

The same process can happen when people are exposed to weak strains of Christianity. Unbelievers can encounter weak strains of faith and be turned off, whereupon they build resistance to God and to religion. Our own anemic expression of faith often immunizes others from catching it. These weak strains of faith, which cause other people to become resistant to God or to the Church, are examples of being negatively dangerous.

Two negatively dangerous strains of faith in particular can vaccinate others from catching the real thing. These two dangerous spiritual maladies are *apathy* and *hypocrisy*. If we are living our faith apathetically, lifelessly, and indifferently, our searching friends will look right past us because they won’t