

LUIS PALAU

with JAY FORDICE



CHANGED BY FAITH

*Dare to Trust God
with Your Broken Pieces . . .
and Watch What Happens*

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To my four godly daughters-in-law:

Michelle Morford Palau,

Gloria Holden Palau,

Wendy Levy Palau, and

Megan Cochran Palau.

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Introduction

I HAVE A FRIEND who is struggling through her eleventh bout with cancer. Ever since she was nineteen years old, it has been an ongoing battle. Cervical cancer. Uterine cancer. Ovarian cancer. Thyroid cancer. Lymph cancer. Stomach cancer. Breast cancer—twice. Malignant melanomas—twice. And now—colon cancer, stage three. Every time, she has beaten it. Every time, she has come out on top. But it hasn't been easy. In fact, it has been downright excruciating at times. It has worn her down and left her weak.

But that's not the whole story.

Over her thirty-five years of trials and testing, my friend has stood strong. With tears at times. In pain nearly constantly. But she stands, to this day, a beautiful example of strength and power. And what many would expect would leave her discouraged and deflated has only succeeded in strengthening her faith.

In reality, we all face hardships. Not everyone will be tested as severely as my friend has been, but there's no question

that life can get tough. Trials will come. Expectations will be crushed. Dreams may be dashed. Whether our challenges are big or small, we all deal with our fair share of trials and disappointments in life. And if we're not careful, they will cause us to crash.

I know. I've been there.

For me, the crash came when I was thirty-five years old.



From the time my wife, Patricia, and I first met—in Portland, Oregon, in 1960—we both had our sights set on the mission field, working to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with people around the world. After we finished our biblical training in 1961, we immediately set out on our adventure, wasting no time. Married a few short months after graduation and soon thereafter commissioned by OC International, we moved to Detroit for an intensive seven-month training course called M.I. (Missionary Internship).

From Detroit, we were sent to Costa Rica. From Costa Rica, we went to Colombia. And from Colombia to Mexico.

From our new base in Mexico, Patricia and I and a small team of missionaries began preparing for evangelistic campaigns all over Latin America. With a vision to proclaim the Good News to entire regions, we dreamed big and envisioned great success. We held major evangelistic festivals throughout Central and South America, partnering with hundreds of churches and reaching thousands of individuals. In some

countries, we found great open doors. In others, great opposition. It was tough. We were exhausted. But there was purpose in it. And we felt fulfilled . . . until the summer of 1969.

For more than six months, our small team had been planning a major initiative in a key Latin American city. We had rented out a local baseball stadium, enlisted support from thousands of volunteers, and paid for extensive publicity. Our goal was to hold a two-week campaign—to share the message of Jesus with as many people as possible in the most public way. I had spent many sleepless nights preparing for the event, which was the biggest I had planned thus far in my career. I had poured my blood, sweat, and tears into the project. And now, only days away, with our advertisements plastered across the city, you could sense the excitement on our team and among the partnering churches. We were sure God was preparing to do something big—to use us in powerful ways.

Our entire team was engaged with the campaign. We had dreamed of something like this for years and had been working overtime for several months to roll it out. To finally see it coming to fruition was overwhelming, to say the least.

Under the surface, however, all was not well. The truth was, we had gone out on a limb financially preparing for the event. I called it faith, but it really wasn't. Instead of having the peace that accompanies true faith in God, I was antsy and impatient. In a rush to move forward with my vision for the event, I unwisely borrowed money from friends and churches, fully believing that the money raised through

offerings during the two weeks would cover the costs. But it never occurred to me that the event might never happen.

Little did I know that the government would revoke our permit two days before opening night.

I received the call from one of my team members.

“Luis,” he said in a panic, “they shut us down. They pulled the plug.”

“What are you talking about?” I said. “What do you mean, they shut us down?”

“The authorities. The government. They pulled our permit. It’s over. We’re done. They said, ‘You cannot have your campaign. It’s against our laws . . . and you are foreigners. And if we catch you trying, you’re going to jail.’”

That was it. The permit was revoked. Our campaign was over before it started. With no avenue for appeal, our six months of planning went up in smoke.

I immediately felt sick. After hours on the phone with city leaders—anyone I could complain to or ask for answers—I finally gave up in despair. All that work. All that preparation. All for naught.

The blow nearly did me in . . . literally. I ended up in bed with a fever but no real illness. For three weeks, I lay in my room, with no desire to get up, no motivation to start again. I was defeated, exhausted, and just plain spent. In the midst of wanting to offer hope to others, I had lost it myself. We now had bills to pay and no revenue. We had apology notes to write. We had our mission and our friends to answer to. The questions would be endless.

I couldn't stop my mind from spinning with thoughts.

Why the change of mind? Why this? Why now? Why me? Why here?

My mind raced and my body ached. Eventually, I found the strength to pray.

“Lord, I believe. I really do. But what good is it? What are you doing? And why do you seem so far away?”

My faith was shaken and my convictions were under attack. Did I really believe what I said I believed? Was this all worth it, even in the pain? I had gone through the motions. I had done the right things. I had trusted the Lord—I *really had!* So why wasn't life turning out the way I expected?

Throughout this time, Patricia was amazing. She cared for me, but she challenged me as well. I remember her saying, “Luis, what are you doing in bed? Get up. Keep going! This isn't the end of you.”

During those three weeks, God was working powerfully in my life. He stripped me of myself, realigned my priorities, and reminded me of the basic, foundational truths of my faith. It was painful, but it was powerful.

As he worked me over, there was only one thing I could bring myself to do. I read like a madman—mainly the Bible. “If this book is true . . . if it really is what I say it is,” I told myself, “it must have answers.” And I was determined to find them. I was determined to scour its pages until I found them.

I focused my attention on the Gospel of John. I read it in every translation in every language I could understand. And as I pored over the pages, I was deeply transformed. I found

my priorities being realigned, my perspective changing, and my understanding of God—my Lord—adapting into something far more powerful . . . far more profound.

Those three weeks of searching changed me completely. And though it was painful, it proved to be the beginning of great things—not the end of my ministry, as I had feared. But it was only after I had done my own soul-searching and my own searching for God, only after I had come to terms with the true Savior—not the one I had created to fit in my own little box—that I could deal with the realities of life and move on to greater things.

Eventually, we held an evangelistic campaign in that city. It was far different than we had ever dreamed, and it was done in the Lord's timing. He used it in powerful ways—in our own lives and in the lives of the people we reached. He moved us to different locations, bringing friends and partners alongside to fill the gaps in our funding and offset our financial shortfalls. All our bills were paid. All debt was forgiven. And just as he has done with so many others throughout history, Jesus showed up just at the right time and dealt with my unbelief.

Since that pivotal summer more than forty years ago, my life and ministry have been radically different. God has done powerful things through me and my entire family—not because of us (in fact, in many ways in spite of us), but because he cares for us and wants to work through us.

Reflecting recently on how Patricia and I have been used in ministry over the years, I was amazed and humbled. God

has taken us to more than seventy nations and has allowed us to present a clear case for Jesus to more than one billion people through television, radio, print, and live events. He has allowed me to speak face-to-face with more than twenty-eight million people, has allowed our team to partner with tens of thousands of churches, and has allowed me to speak directly to presidents, royalty, and other leaders throughout the world. Best of all, he has allowed me to lead tens of thousands of individuals—if not more—to a personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

Looking back, I realize that the summer of 1969 was a defining moment for me. I wouldn't be where I am today if I hadn't gone through that season of testing. The questions I asked were healthy ones. The pain was necessary. It stripped away the façade and established who I really was and who I was really serving. Ultimately, it bolstered my faith and showed me the true power of the gospel.

I'm sure you've dealt with something similar. The promotion you worked so hard to attain yet never received. The business venture you risked your life savings on, only to lose every last bit of it. The boyfriend or girlfriend, husband or wife, for whom you put your life on the line, only to be left empty-handed and broken. The children you worked so hard to raise, only to be left disappointed and in pain. The family you loved, only to be rejected. The house you mortgaged—and lost to foreclosure.

Sure, you continue in your faith. You still believe what you believe. But there are questions. Deep questions. The

pain lingers. And the transformed life promised by preachers like me seems to be just as far away as when you began the journey.

We've all felt it—the rejection, the confusion, the devastation, the lack of answers. It's almost a rite of passage. But is there real, life-changing hope in the midst of it all? I believe there is. I'd like to tell you that your best days could very well still be ahead of you—if you trust God.

But how do you get there?

How do you overcome your current situation?

How do you allow yourself to be changed by faith?

Those are the deep questions. Those are the tough questions. And those are exactly the questions I hope to help you answer for yourself.

1

EXPECT MORE

THE CONVERTIBLE LAY upside down in pieces across the rain-soaked motorway just outside London. Tire tread, debris, and scraped pavement trailed behind the car for more than forty feet. Steam hissed from the smashed engine. Metal crunched and glass cracked as the small car rocked back and forth on its hood.

Grant, the nineteen-year-old driver, had been thrown from the wreckage, sent flying over the side barrier upon impact. He lay limp and unconscious in the bushes beside the road. Though he was bruised and battered, his wounds would not prove fatal. Brandy—his passenger and girlfriend—was not as fortunate. Held tightly in her seat by the belt across her

lap, she had been flipped and flung as the vehicle cartwheeled across the road. She was dead before the car came to a stop.

It was three days before her sixteenth birthday.

I received the news just a few hours after the accident—awakened by the telephone in the early morning hours. I rubbed my eyes and reached for the phone. It was my good friend Bill, Grant's father, and I could tell he was shaken up.

"Luis, it's awful," he began.

"Bill, what's going on? What happened?"

"Grant and Brandy—they were in an accident. You remember Brandy, right?"

"Of course I remember Brandy. How is she? How are they? Tell me, what happened?"

Bill hesitated. I could tell he was fighting back tears. "It's not good, Luis. Grant is in hospital. But Brandy . . . Brandy is gone."

"What happened?"

"Luis, it was stupid. The two were out for a drive—just heading to the store. Grant was driving too fast through the hills in the rain, and he lost control of the car. One split second."

"Bill, I'm so sorry. What can I do?"

"Come. Come to England. We need you here. Brandy's family needs you. Her mother asked for you specifically."

I was quiet, still trying to absorb the news.

"Come do the memorial service, will you?" he insisted. "You played such a significant role in Brandy's life. I know it's what she would want."

“Of course I’ll come, Bill.”

I was on a plane to London’s Heathrow Airport before the week was out.



As I sat in the airplane, jet engines humming in the background, I couldn’t help but think back to the first time I met young Brandy. It was three years earlier, at a youth gathering where I was scheduled to speak. She had come with her new boyfriend, Grant, and she was beaming from ear to ear. Little did I know that her smile masked a world of pain.

To all appearances, Brandy had everything going for her. She was bright and beautiful and came from a well-to-do family. Her father was a classical musician, and her mother was a television personality. And now she had a handsome boyfriend from a good family as well. Her future looked bright. I would later come to find out that her life was nowhere near as perfect as she let on.

As I shared my message that day, challenging the crowd to give their lives to Jesus Christ and to let him take their ashes and turn them into something beautiful, I had a sense I was speaking directly to Brandy. Sure enough, at the end of my talk, when I gave the invitation, she was among the first to stand and make her way to the stage—running, not walking, with Grant following quickly behind.

I jumped off the stage and found Brandy in the crowd. I could see she wanted to talk, and I wanted to offer her

encouragement and guidance. As we sat down together, along with Grant, I asked her questions about her life, knowing that my message had struck a chord. Now, even three years later, her story was still fresh in my mind.

“Brandy, what’s on your heart?” I asked.

“I need help.”

“What do you mean?”

“My life—it’s just not what I would have ever dreamed it would be.”

“Tell me.”

“I feel so alone. I feel unloved. My parents don’t get along, and they’re too busy for me. I don’t even live with them. No one seems to care.”

I could sense the pain hiding just below the surface.

“Why don’t you live with your parents?”

“They divorced several years ago and live in different areas. I’m just a distraction to them. They sent me to live with my aunt and uncle, so I only see them on occasion. I feel tossed around—and that’s just the beginning. Why is life so difficult?”

“Brandy, I’m sorry,” I said. “Sometimes that’s just the way it is. But you’re wrong about no one caring. There *is* someone who cares. There *is* a reason for hope. You were made for more than this.”

I could tell she was still processing my message, but it was beginning to click in her mind.

“Do you go to church, Brandy?”

“No. My parents have never been into religion. And my aunt and uncle are atheists.”

“Have you ever read the Bible?”

“No. Never.”

“So, what do you believe?”

“I don’t really know. But your message—it made sense.”

“Brandy, there is someone who cares about you. There is someone who wants to see you succeed. He wants to give you purpose, joy, and a truly meaningful life. His name is Jesus.”

“I’m just not sure,” she said.

“I know. The world is full of trouble. Your life isn’t perfect. You have struggles. You have pain. But Jesus came to overcome the trouble and pain of this world. He came to give you life!”

Over the next several minutes, Brandy continued to pour out her pain and her struggles as Grant and I tried to encourage her. She was so lonely, so broken, so discouraged. She wanted hope. She needed a fresh start. She craved something or someone she could trust. Her parents had let her down. Her aunt and uncle, though they had opened their home to her, were not always there for her emotionally. There were so many insecurities, so many painful memories, and so many unanswered questions. And she was still so young.

Finally, I knew it was time to challenge her. Looking her straight in the eye, I said, “Brandy, do you want your life to change? Do you want to see success where there is failure now? Do you want real, transforming purpose in your life?”

“I want it more than anything in the world,” she said, now on the verge of tears.

“So tell me, Brandy, why did you come forward?”

“Because I want to know Jesus!”

As we continued to talk, I was amazed by her humility, hunger, and eagerness to learn. You could tell the message had shaken her. And as I explained in more detail what it meant to follow Jesus as her Savior, she understood perfectly. She got it. That day, Brandy gave her life over to Jesus and became a new creation.

Over the next three years, Brandy’s life was radically transformed. Even as a young teenager, she saw God do powerful things. She became a winsome encourager among her friends, and her life exuded purpose, hope, and joy. She couldn’t stop talking about Jesus, and she couldn’t keep from smiling.

Even her parents saw something captivating in Brandy. As she spent more time with her mother and father and their high-society friends, they were all encouraged and blessed by her. People were drawn to Brandy, and she was always quick to tell them that the real attraction was Jesus. Even her aunt and uncle—both staunch atheists—eventually made their own commitment to Jesus Christ. They both admitted to me personally that it was a direct result of Brandy’s life and testimony. Brandy’s life had been powerfully transformed. There was no question about that.



At the memorial service, the church was packed with musicians and movie stars, high school students, family members, friends, and acquaintances. As I stood in front of the casket and shared about Brandy's life, I was amazed at how in three short years this sweet, little girl had touched the lives of literally hundreds of people. Her life had gone from painful to powerful. She and everyone around her had seen her ashes turned to beauty. Her life and her story had been redeemed.

This young girl accomplished more in those three years than many people accomplish in a lifetime. And her story is a challenge to each one of us. Brandy was a baby in terms of her spiritual walk. But she was faithful. And she saw God use her in powerful ways.

Ashes into beauty. Pain into power. Rejection into rejoicing. It's something we all desire. And it's within our reach.

So why don't we see more of it?

Why don't we see more radical transformation in people's lives? In our own lives?

Why don't we experience a more thrilling adventure of faith and trust—just like Brandy?

To be honest, many of us have become comfortable Christians. We go to church; we believe that the Bible is true; we've been to Sunday school; and we have the right answers and can cite the right verses; but in many ways we have become lethargic, pew-sitting believers. Others have given up on church completely. Their fire has died down to embers, and they've resigned themselves to the conclusion

that profound transformation—which the Bible seems to promise—is something they won't fully realize until they get to heaven. Though in the meantime they may experience some wisps and whispers of God's power, for the most part life is too cruel and their circumstances are too difficult to see that God is actively at work right here and right now.



Maybe your problem is a crisis of belief. Maybe you feel as if your circumstances are so far out of control that only a complete miracle could make any difference.

Well, it's hard to imagine circumstances more out of control than the situations faced by many throughout the Bible. We read stories of sick women, blind beggars, guilt-ridden fathers, even murderers and prostitutes. We are reminded of God's power as he takes these individuals and transforms their lives into something beautiful. The Bible is full of stories of individuals in far worse situations than ours . . . people who called upon the name of the Lord and found healing, hope, encouragement, and new life.

One story that always strikes me with power is found three places in the Bible (Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; and Luke 9:1-6, 37-43). It's the story of a demon-possessed boy and a father who struggled with his faith.

If you're familiar with the story, you know that the boy had been afflicted since childhood with an evil spirit. The father had brought the boy to some of Jesus' disciples to see

if they could cast out the demon; but they were unable to—even though Jesus had specifically given them the power and authority to heal.

When Jesus eventually arrived on the scene, the father, who by then was at the end of his rope, pleaded with Jesus to heal his son. He called out to him, “Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. . . . Have mercy on us and help us, *if you can*.”¹

“What do you mean, ‘If I can?’” Jesus asked. “Anything is possible if a person believes.”²

As soon as the father realized his folly, he fell down next to his son at Jesus’ feet. With tears in his eyes and pain in his voice, he humbly pleaded, “I do believe; *help my unbelief*.”³

At that, Jesus turned to the boy, knelt down, and prayed. With authority and power he rebuked the evil spirit. And within seconds, the boy was healed. Peace returned to his young body. Hope returned to the scene.



If you're at all like me, when you read a story like that, you get encouraged. You get excited to see Jesus show up to save the day and bring peace and wholeness back to the scene. After all, it's what we all want. It's what we all dream of, deep down. We breathe a sigh of relief when we see that God truly cares about our circumstances and that he truly is able to heal, even in the midst of our weak faith. And you can't

help but wonder if he will do the same for you . . . someday . . . in some way.

But now for the hard questions: How often have you seen a scenario like that played out in your own life? How often have you really, truly seen Jesus show up and do something so dramatic? Where was he when your friend died? Why did he seem distant when your job disappeared? Why didn't he stop the cancer? Where was his grace when your spouse decided to leave? Why would he let you lose your baby?

It's not that you don't believe. Like Brandy, you trust that Jesus is alive. Like the father of the young boy, you believe, at least in part, that Jesus can have an impact on your life. You know he's at work in the world. You believe in miracles—you've just never actually seen one. You wonder why God is so silent at times, and why you're not able to bring his power to bear in your own family, community, or circumstances. Maybe, you tell yourself, Jesus just hasn't shown up yet. Maybe his attention is focused someplace else—in Haiti or India or somewhere in Africa. But in *your* life . . . with your circumstances . . . you just don't see it. After all, does Jesus really care about you? Does he really have the power and desire to take your ashes—your pain—and turn them into beauty?

Still, you'd like to believe that the same purpose and power that Brandy experienced is available to you. In fact, you do believe it's *possible*, but you want to experience it for yourself—right now. Just like the father in the story, when

confronted with tough situations, you can't help but utter the words, "*Lord, I believe. Please help my unbelief.*"



On the other hand, maybe you've become a cynic. You believe that God exists and you have at least a vague understanding of Jesus. But you just don't buy into the hype about modern-day miracles and life transformation. And frankly, you don't see much difference between some Christians you know and anyone else. Sure, faith in Jesus may be great for others, but what's the point for you? Why should you really care? And why should you subject yourself to that sort of religious lifestyle? It's so confining—so restricting. Besides, is it really real?

Wherever you fall on the spectrum of faith, I'm sure you've thought to yourself on occasion, *What's the point?* You question whether faith in God—or trust in Jesus and his Word—can really make a difference in your daily life.

We all have times of questioning—wondering about the purpose of it all. We've all had our fair share of trials. We've felt the pain, struggled with the despair, and been left asking why. We get tired of the rat race and tired of this boring old life. In desperation, we call out to God. We ask Jesus to show up and bring peace and liberation to the scene—to transform our lives into something truly meaningful and powerful. And yet, he seems oddly silent. We're left wondering, *Jesus, where are you? Jesus, what am I missing?*

Apathy sets in. Despair takes over.

Like most of us, you shut yourself off from the rest of the world—while preserving the illusion of being connected—and continue life as best you can.

But you were made for more than that!



We live in a broken world. But I don't have to tell you that. We've all had our lives come crashing down around us at one time or another. We've felt the weight on our shoulders, and we've crumbled under the pressure. Some have turned to alcohol, drugs, food, sex, or other pursuits in order to get through it. Others fantasize about suicide, winning the lottery, or finding their soul mate. It seems we'll turn to anything to find comfort. We're all looking to fill our lives with something. And yet the next morning, the pain is still there; the wounds are still fresh.

Let's face it: All too often, our lives are not what we hoped they would be. The grass is never green enough. The sky is never blue enough. The vacation is never sweet enough, long enough, or relaxing enough. The money never goes far enough. The relationships never satisfy. The expectations never pan out. And the plans never turn out the way we expected. Regardless of what we believe, we all seem to be struggling with the same not-quite-what-I-signed-up-for reality.

If that is where you find yourself today, take heart! No

matter what you're struggling with, there's hope. I know it! I've experienced it, and I want to share it with you. As you read this book and consider how this all fits together, I want to encourage you to think long and hard about who you really are, what life is really all about, what you really believe, and how God—our Creator—fits into your story, if at all. I'm not talking about a "Sunday only" type of faith. I'm talking about real, transformational faith. I'm talking about a life that is worth living—and a faith that doesn't disappoint. After all, isn't that what we all want?

I'm not writing just to make an argument. I'm writing from my heart, which is why you'll find elements of my own story throughout these pages. I'm writing from personal experience, from my deep passion for other people and for God, and from my desire to see people set free to live life the way it was meant to be lived.

Jesus is still alive. He is at work. He is redeeming our lives. And yes, just as he did for Brandy and the demon-possessed boy, he is still raising people from the ash heap of life.

It's time to stop holding your breath and expecting the worst. It's time to stop merely dreaming of a better life. Whether or not you can see where the road leads from where you're standing doesn't matter. It's time to put your faith in the one who sees the end from the beginning, the one who has the power to cast out demons, heal our diseases, and set our feet on solid ground.

It's time to say, "I believe. Lord, help my unbelief!"

About the Authors

LUIS PALAU

For more than fifty years, Luis Palau has been a powerful spokesman for the relevance, reality, and significance of spirituality for individuals around the world. His work as a speaker, teacher, author, and spiritual leader has taken him to more than seventy nations, and his campaigns have allowed him to present a clear case for Christianity to more than one billion people worldwide through television, radio, print, and live events.

Luis is known as one of the world's leading advocates for Christianity—standing strong for issues of faith and the importance of a vibrant, healthy spiritual life according to the teachings of the Bible. He is well respected around the world, and especially in Latin America, where he has spent much of his career—including several years of service in Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Guatemala. Luis is regarded by many as the most influential spiritual leader in the past forty years in Central and South America.

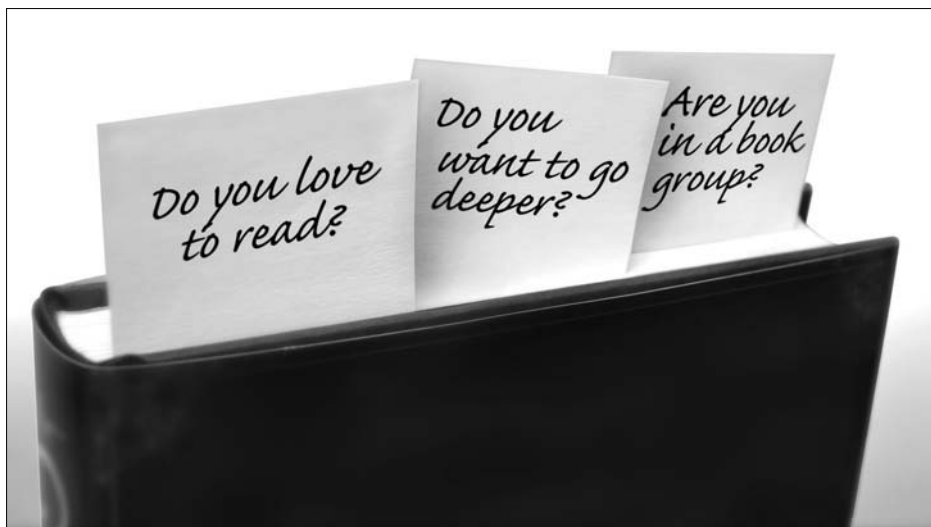
He is the author of more than forty books, host of three international daily radio programs, and head of the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association. He has dedicated his life and career to presenting the claims of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible.

JAY FORDICE

Jay Fordice is a writer and key team member for the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association. He has served on the Palau Association's development team since 2003, working on donor communication. For the past several years, Jay has also worked closely with Luis Palau on numerous articles and book projects.

Prior to joining the Palau Association, Jay worked as a communications director and short-term-team coordinator for HCJB World Radio in Quito, Ecuador.

Jay and his wife, Michele, live in Portland, Oregon, with their two sons, Carter and Elliot.



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