Pastor Troy Evans is a pioneer and innovative leader in reaching and changing the lives of those who are trapped by the ways of the street with a relevant message of the cross of Christ wired to the hip-hop culture. This book is a long-awaited voice for the voiceless that will reveal the hope that is needed. It is not just for those serving in the city or those with gang backgrounds, but for those who serve anywhere broken people live. This book is for all ages, ethnicities, and genders because it is for those whose care comes from a place of pain.

—**Phil Jackson**, coauthor of *The Hip-Hop Church*,
lead pastor of The House Covenant Church

This book reflects its author; its passionate and real. Through this book, Troy will compel you to reach people who are far from God in your context. Read and be inspired.

—**Chris Conrad**, district superintendent,
Great Lakes Region, The Wesleyan Church

Troy is one of my heroes! His life is a story of hope for countless youth trying to overcome the gang lifestyle. You too will be inspired by the story that God is writing in and through his life. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to do ministry in the urban context.

—**Larry Acosta**, CEO, Urban Youth Workers Institute

For those called to reach this generation of urban America, this book will give you the tools you need to understand the culture. God has not forgotten our cities. He is only waiting for those who care about youth, to be better equipped to handle the business at hand.

—**Rod Thomas**, features producer, *The 700 Club*

The Edge of Redemption encompasses the best practices in youth development, cultural relevance to urban culture, and God's Word to provide a practical, research-based, how-to guide that inspires and prepares those serious about outreach to urban families.

—**Stacy Stout**, former education director,
Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

This book is a must-read; the story not only tells how God has taken a man from the edge of darkness and destruction into the center of his marvelous light, but it sheds light on the reality that so many young men and women are facing in cities across America today. It is ministries like The EDGE and ministers like Troy Evans God has raised up for such a time as this.

—**Dave Bever, Jr.**

The Edge of Redemption will help you understand today's youth as it gives you extremely practical suggestions on how individuals and churches can make room in their congregations for this new generation. This book is not only about how to work with the hip-hop generation, but is also about how God can redeem the brokenness of today's youth.

—**Henry Bouma**, executive director,
R-House Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Troy does an incredible job of sharing his powerful story and weaving in application points throughout the book for the reader. The new multi-ethnic urban church is emerging everywhere, and we need more great resources like this!

—**Tommy "Urban D." Kyllonen**,
Crossover Church, Tampa, Florida

10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY EDITION

THE EDGE OF REDEMPTION

A Story of Reaching the Unreachable

TROY EVANS
with Ann Byle

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In memory of the late Dr. MaLinda Sapp and Geralden Bentley (Snooter, aka Gent), a seventeen-year-old young man I loved dearly and called my nephew, who was shot down and robbed in the inner city of Grand Rapids, Michigan. His brutal, unsolved murder became my breaking point; his death pushed me to say that the church must do something to reach the rough guys like I once was.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to God for caring enough to send his Son to free me from the bondage of sin and destruction. I do not deserve the grace that has been extended to me through the blood of Jesus Christ. I also thank the Lord for my beautiful wife and best friend, LaDawn, who has loved me through all of my imperfections. You have shown me, by example, how to love. I cannot imagine life without you.

To my supportive children, Erin, Toni, Adrienne, and Anthony: Thank you for your willingness to share me with the rest of the world as I travel and minister to the lost. To my mom, Linda Love, my greatest supporter in the world: I thank you for always being there for me and believing in me.

To my dad, Gaylord Love: You are, and have always been, my Superman. Thank you for accepting and loving me as your boy when you did not have to. To all my siblings: I love you all for being patient with me even when I did not love myself. To my extended EDGE family: I love you with all of my heart and thank you for serving alongside me. I am so grateful for all of your love and support. I thank you, Denny Johnson, for helping me flesh out my thoughts and for encouraging me when I need it. Thank you to Pastor Wayne Schmidt, Pastor Kyle Ray, Henry Bouma, Mark Doane, Pastor Harold Stancle, Pastor Jermone Glenn, and Pastor Dave Beelen for always being willing to listen and believe in what God has entrusted me to do.

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I also want to thank Craig Q., B-Mack, and John for the many experiences we shared as youths and for your willingness to allow me to share some of them in this book. I also thank the whole McKinney family for taking me in as a young man and loving me as your own.

FOREWORD

It has been my privilege to connect with many wonderful ministry colleagues over the past three decades. Among them are a few who have been gifted by God in rare ways and experienced such an unusual life journey that they have a unique kingdom contribution to make. Such a man of God is Troy Evans.

I first met Troy, his wife LaDawn, and their family when they visited Kentwood Community Church (KCC), where I served as senior pastor. At the time, we were on our way to becoming a multiethnic church with an increasing desire to reach our community, a first-ring suburb of Grand Rapids, Michigan, where our local school hosted students from homes within which fifty-eight different languages were spoken. It was wonderful to welcome this African American family, who combined spiritual depth with a heart for ministry to our community. They began serving with Kyle Ray, our outreach pastor, to help us impact the changing community immediately surrounding the church.

Some weeks later, I attended a conference that was conceived and promoted by Troy. The event focused on the reality of gangs in midsized cities like Grand Rapids. It was obvious that Troy possessed what I call "convening" power—the capacity to bring together people who don't tend to, but need to, come together for the good of a community. That conference was attended by church leaders, law enforcement officers, community dignitaries, and gang leaders and members. A whole new world was opened up to me and many of those who attended. It was also a joy

to see Troy's whole family engaged in hosting the event; it was obvious that some of his greatest joy came from doing ministry as family.

He also had the capacity to gain an audience with current gang leaders and knew the lay of the city. His background in music, dance, visual arts, and business prepared him to create a ministry that could reach people others could not. He helped create a hip-hop outreach named The EDGE Urban Fellowship.

I would learn from Troy that a vital ministry in an urban context had to be driven by so much more than a worship service. It took a variety of activities operating seven days a week to create enough connecting points with the various ages and life stages of those the ministry was called to reach. Being a hip-hop ministry, I expected the audience to be almost exclusively young and African American. But those gathered were wonderfully diverse ethnically and generationally. The diversity of the crowd is a manifestation of Troy's vision to create a multiethnic ministry led by a multiethnic core team. (I also learned that my assumption that the consumers of rap music were only young African Americans was a stereotype, and the music and culture attracted a far wider audience.)

Troy is a man who loves Jesus and his family and pays the price to reach a particular people group found in urban areas across America and around the world. The personal brokenness he experienced in his early years has been marvelously redeemed and recreated into a wholeness that makes it possible for him to live out the life of Jesus in the most challenging of neighborhoods.

Troy is passionate about reaching out and helping others. But his ministry has depth, too; people under his leadership become people of the Word and grow to love God completely and others unconditionally. He is a modern-day apostle Paul, reaching those others consider unreachable and paying the

price that they might know abundant life, even in the face of suffering.

In my estimation, Troy has an apostolic gift, the God-given capacity not only to bring one ministry into existence, but also to catalyze a ministry multiplication movement. This is fueled by his commitment to multiplication of disciples and leaders. I believe he will influence the broader ministry community to become increasingly urban and multiethnic, a potential that will only be fully realized if others learn from him and join with him.

This book provides such a learning opportunity. May God use Troy's story and insights, as God has used Troy in my life, to broaden your view of ministry possibilities and inspire you to engage more fully in creative, fruitful kingdom work.

—Wayne Schmidt
General Superintendent
The Wesleyan Church

THE LOST

1

LOST CHILDREN

From the earliest age,
we are pushed to the edge.

Every book needs a little back story. I—and you—need to know where I came from to know where I'm going. Every day I look back on my journey and thank God for how he led me from darkness to light, from violence to peace, from ruthless to redeemed. My hope is that as God blessed me, he may bless you.

I am the third child and second son of my mother, Linda Evans Love. My sister Lisa, five years older than me, is the daughter of my mother's youth, born in 1966 when my mom was just seventeen. She was married to Lisa's father, Michael Evans; but he died in 1969 while in the US Army. My brother Mark and I, fourteen months apart, are the birth sons of Mark Morgan, the pastor's son at the church we attended just a few minutes' walk from home. My parents' families had grown up together in the neighborhood, attending Davis Memorial

Church of God in Christ (named in honor of my birth father's grandfather). My parents' relationship was short, but long enough to produce us boys.

I was born on August 21, 1972—a sultry day after what my mom describes as a long, hot summer. She laughs when she says she spent most of that summer sitting in front of a fan. I was born during the day at Butterworth Hospital in Grand Rapids after what my mom says was an easy labor. She had an apartment across the street from my grandma's place when Lisa, Mark, and I were each born.

Mark and I never had a relationship with our biological father. We attended the church our grandfather pastored, Davis Memorial, but never had much of a relationship with him, either. We called him Elder Morgan when we occasionally spoke to him. I've seen my father maybe six times in my life because he moved around a lot, and he didn't support us in any way. My mom cared for us alone until she met Gaylord Love when I was just six weeks old.

HOME AND FAMILY

Gaylord Love, the man I knew as my dad, met my mom in October 1972. Gaylord became the father figure in my life and the love of my mother's. He was a man's man—not very emotional or talkative, but he loved us and did things, especially sports, with us. We enjoyed weightlifting together, though I wasn't as much of an athlete as my brother Mark. Dad took us to the park, played a little catch, and taught us to ride bikes and fish. Together my mom and dad had two more children: my sister Teressa in 1981, and my brother Raymond in 1985. Gaylord and my mother both worked a couple of jobs each to feed us, clothe us, and keep us living in a decent house.

When we were young, my mom worked for the Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department as an activities coordinator at the Paul I. Phillips Gymnasium on the near southeast side of town. When we kids got older, she worked full time washing dishes at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel during the week, and part time for the Parks and Recreation Department on the weekend. The Amway Grand was a long way from our neighborhood, not so much in distance but in status. The fancy hotel served the upper crust of Grand Rapids and its guests. While they sipped champagne at the restaurants in the hotel or danced at a fundraising dinner, my mother ran the dishwashing machine. She eventually became assistant manager of the stewarding department, working there thirteen years. I worked there for a short time as well, before my mom had to fire me for coming in late to my shift.

My dad also worked two jobs. His full-time job as a security officer for Grand Rapids Public Schools took him away from home all week, and his weekends were usually filled with more work for the Parks and Recreation Department. Often he'd fall asleep—head lolling back, snoring, with his dinner plate tipping precariously in his lap—as he watched TV while waiting to go to his next job.

We ran from house to house and were treated by the adults who lived there as their own. If we needed a swat, we got one. If we needed food, we got it. If we needed a hug or a bandage, we got that too.

We kids had our own family gang back then. Our gang was nothing like what I became involved in later; it was just a bunch of neighborhood kids. We ran from house to house and were treated by the adults who lived there as their own. If we needed a swat, we got one. If we needed food, we got it. If we needed a hug or a bandage, we got that too. We loved to play hide-and-seek and marbles and did gymnastics off the roofs. We loved to ride our bikes no-handed down Francis Street hill, coasting to see who could get to the bottom fastest. I have a lot of fond memories of a childhood spent with friends and family.

My neighborhood was full of family. My uncle Sonny lived next door, and up the street was my biological father's cousin who had fourteen kids. My mom had eleven siblings, many who lived nearby. My cousins were in and out of the house all the time. We were a wild bunch, racing in and out the doors, eating like crazy, fighting, and making up. My cousins were like my own brothers and sisters, and we were the same to them.

We appreciated my parents' multiple jobs most at Christmas. My mom took this holiday seriously! She didn't give us lots of gifts throughout the year, but she loved to save up and give us stuff at Christmas. She told me she'd buy stuff on sale all year and hide it in the attic.

We loved the decorations, food, and anticipation of the big event, tearing downstairs early in the morning to gape at the gifts under the tree. My mom made us wait to open gifts until we were all up, but the wait was worth it. The best present I remember getting was my first remote control car. I could program where it would go using a little computer in the car. I loved to watch that car roam around the house, nipping at the heels of my parents and siblings.

I went to church, had two parents in the home, and had enough to eat. But all that doesn't mean much when a young person begins to be drawn into the darker, more tempting side of life.

I spent a lot of time at my grandparents' house on Caufield Street on the west side of Grand Rapids during the summers and when my mom needed to be gone at night during the school year. My grandparents' house had only one way in, so we had to pass between the TV and my grandfather's chair to get to the rest of the house.

"Get out of my light," he'd holler every time we walked through, which was pretty often during those long summer days. We called him Daddy, the only person I'd ever called Daddy in my childhood. I called Gaylord by his first name from childhood. It wasn't until after he and my mom married, well into my adulthood, that I began to call him Dad.

STARVED FOR TRUTH

I've come to realize that life choices and events happen despite even the most stable upbringing. I went to church, had two parents in the home, and had enough to eat. But all that doesn't mean much when a young person begins to be drawn into the darker, more tempting side of life.

My early school years were typical for our neighborhood. Many of my cousins came to the house before school because my mom in charge of getting us off. We took the bus to Alger Elementary School, and later we walked to Burton Middle

School. We were back at my house after school with my older sister usually in charge.

Church wasn't a huge part of our lives. Some of my cousins had no choice but to attend services each week, but we were merely encouraged to attend. My mother insisted she'd never set foot in another church after she'd witnessed the hypocrisy, greed, and lust in the church of her youth. My biological father was a pastor's son, after all. Yet we made the three-minute walk to my grandfather's church as often as possible. I learned about the foundations of faith, was informed often of the consequences of sin, and even attended purity classes designed to teach us about the carnal sins we would face one day soon.

The fall of man and the redeeming power of the living God were discussed often though I didn't fully understand. I came to see God as simply wanting me to perform for him, and if I didn't, God would display his wrath because he was the boss and he could. I concluded that God was a bully, which to me was the weakest display of manhood. I decided I wasn't interested in what God had to offer, but I sure was interested in the treats, activities, and girls.

I decided I wasn't interested in what God had to offer, but I sure was interested in the treats, activities, and girls.

My thinking about God as a giant bully made its way into the classroom. I had a bit of a Robin Hood mentality. I despised bullies and would fight them whenever I thought it necessary, sticking up for kids who were being picked on. One boy, a fifth-grader named Danny, was built like a grown man. He'd get high by picking on anyone he wanted. One day, I'd had enough, so I called him out. He called me a couple of nasty names, and I called him a couple of names; we came face-to-face in the schoolyard, but the bell rang to end recess.

"Why did I do that?" I said to myself. The standoff became the talk of the school that day because no one had ever stood up to Danny. The showdown occurred after school. Danny found me and called me a four-letter word, then we rushed at each other like charging bulls. We ended up on the ground, me in a headlock and Danny's leg clinched in my arms. We might have stayed there for hours but Danny said, "Want to quit?"

I said yes, and we got up and walked away. The next day we became best friends for the duration of our elementary years.

I was much more talented outside the classroom than in it during those school years. I didn't grasp the concept of basic subjects such as reading and math, so I didn't do well academically and seemed incapable of making good choices. One of my bad choices involved a White kid named Craig, someone I thought of as a friend until he called me the "N" word. I waited until the last recess, then ran full speed at him, jumping over a small fence and delivering a furious snap kick to his face.

He dropped, and I was all over him. I hit him until I felt the hands of the principal grabbing my collar. He dragged me across the playground as I kicked and screamed, no one else saying a word. I had to call my mom and explain to her what happened. She was at the school in less than twenty minutes,

hollering at the principal and the whole school about what that boy called me. I was in trouble at school for fighting but didn't get in trouble at home (for once).

I admit to being a bit animated in class from third through sixth grades (I'm sure my teachers would call it something else). I goofed off, blew off homework, generally misbehaved as much as possible. Looking back, I probably did that because I struggled so much with reading and math. I couldn't understand either one, so I felt dumb. Somehow I skated through each year until sixth grade, but that grade was another monster altogether.

Ms. Sherman didn't put up with my foolishness at all. I failed every subject, got in trouble, and generally made her and everyone else miserable. One day, near the end of the year, she sat me down. She wore pearls and a teal-colored shirt. Her breath smelled like coffee as she leaned toward me.

"Troy, you don't deserve to pass sixth grade. But I'm going to pass you to get you out of my face," she said. And she did. I was headed for seventh grade, a much bigger world. I wouldn't do well there either.

I saw the fancy cars and bling of the drug dealers and envied the gang members' freedom. Dealers were eager to make friends and drum up new customers. Violence was everywhere—gang shootings, murder, drug dealing, prostitution, stabbings, theft.

My early years influenced me in many ways. In my urban neighborhood, as in many such neighborhoods, danger lurked around every corner. I saw the fancy cars and bling of the drug dealers and envied the gang members' freedom. Dealers were eager to make friends and drum up new customers. Violence was everywhere—gang shootings, murder, drug dealing, prostitution, stabbings, theft.

My family experience was not unusual in my neighborhood. There wasn't a lot of supervision because my mom and dad worked, as did many other parents. They were blue-collar workers and kept two jobs each to feed us. We never went hungry physically.

But I did go hungry spiritually. I was starved for answers, yet I wasn't allowed to ask the questions at church or engage in healthy discussions with leaders of the faith. My questions were viewed as rebellious, and the lines of communication were shut down and replaced with nothing but lectures about sin and its consequences. This left me in a place of want and despair—the perfect starting point for life on the streets and gang activity.

I call this "foundational truth malnutrition and starvation."

Some churches offer rules and sermons but not how to really live with the foundational truths of God. I starved in my desire for answers. I filled my spiritual belly with hip-hop dancing, drinking, gangs, and violence.

TAKE IT HOME

Ministries can avoid truth malnutrition and starvation.

1. How can you open your doors to the children and teens in your neighborhood, giving them a safe place to be and safe things to do?

2. Young people have questions and want answers. How can you open the lines of communication? Can you be the place they come to for answers about life and about God?
3. Kids face tough issues every day: pressure to have sex, drink, use drugs, cheat, steal; they have no jobs, no money, no hope for the future. How willing are you to talk about the tough issues? Can you talk honestly and realistically about how to say no? Can you offer life-skills learning opportunities and let them see that living differently is within their grasp?
4. Can you speak the truth with love? You'll want to move beyond the physical and emotional to the spiritual issues—how they relate to others and their world. Talk about the hard stuff—sin, sacrifice, redemption, and forgiveness. And keep talking about it. I wonder how different my life would have been had I gotten answers to some of the questions I had.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TROY A. EVANS (known as PE) has been married to LaDawn since 1996. They have five biological and an army of non-biological children, and many grandchildren.

PE was a former gang member/leader that was indicted during a grand jury investigation. After receiving many death threats, he ran from West Michigan to the south and soon became homeless. Years later, PE made his way to Detroit, Michigan, where he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ and began serving in a local church on the east side of Detroit. With only a sixth-grade education, he became a network administrator for some of Detroit's top corporations, and then started a staffing firm.

PE and Dawn have planted four churches and served in urban ministry for over twenty-two years. PE has mentored dozens of church leaders from around the world in leadership development, urban ministry, and church planting. He has become an international speaker, the go-to person in the area of urban church planting, gang prevention, urban ministry, and small business startups. He has been featured on ABC Family Special (700 Club), TEDx, NPR, and many other media outlets.

PE walked away from his life in the IT industry and as a business owner, to serve as an urban missionary at The EDGE—focusing on reaching those in the hip-hop culture for God. He has served as the Urban Church Planting Catalyst for The Wesleyan Church in the United States and England. He is a consultant for churches, denominations, and networks interested in church planting, and co-owner of the national clothing brand, Hustle Pray Eat LLC.