

Danny Ray

I Deceive People

Writer: Trish Teves

Danny Ray is a master magician. He has the ability to captivate a room of teenagers and make grown men scratch their heads in wonder. He is a premiere illusionist, a wizard of awes. His art is a rare one, one that took my breath away the first time I witnessed it. When I met him that night, he seemed friendly and professional, but restrained. After a few conversations, he was more relaxed and showed off his quick wit, but he had an intensity in his face that suggests another world is spinning in his head. It's an energy that drives him to be better, quicker...*trickier*. And more adept at sharing a message he believes can save people's lives. He has performed for thousands of people across Japan, Europe, Canada, Mexico, and the United States; his favorite venue is the Close-up Gallery at the Magic Castle, where only the most elite magicians are allowed to display their talent. Holding a master's degree in divinity and with years of youth ministry experience, Danny Ray has no peer when it comes to preaching, magic, and mass appeal. But Danny was not always sure he should perform his natural ability of sleight of hand. At age ten, Danny began practicing magic and became really good, really fast. He continued to practice and was performing for audiences by the age of fifteen. It was then that a friend invited Danny to church. The youth pastor at the church gave a powerful message of Christianity. "That night at youth group was a pivotal point in my life," Danny recalls. Danny decided that full-time ministry was what he wanted to do, but he struggled with continuing his hobby of magic. "I remember picking up the Bible and reading 'magicians are going to hell.' But some of the counselors at youth group encouraged me that what I did was not sorcery or witchcraft, but sleight of hand; I can explain how I do it. It's very different than what is being referred to in the Old Testament." Since then, Danny has been on a fast track to preach the Gospel...using magic. A pioneer in trickery, he uses four guns (three loaded) to preach about "making good choices." But the best trick of all is that he's using a craft, commonly associated with wickedness, to shed light on a hopeful, virtuous message.

Interviewed exclusively for Risen Magazine

Risen Magazine: How easy is it to trick someone?

Danny Ray: I have studied deception most of my life. It is clear to me how easy it is to deceive people. I do it for entertainment purposes and for fun, but ultimately to share God's life-changing message. However, if I wanted to use what I know to con people, I could. If I wanted to use it to persuade people to do things for me, I could. Satan uses deception to trap us in countless ways. There are some things in the art of magic and illusion that are powerful but completely dishonest. I don't incorporate them. I don't lie to people, but I use

misdirection (getting them to look where I want them to look) and sleight of hand. Let me give you an example of how powerful some of the deception can be. There is a method called recreating history. Let's say I wanted to vanish a coin. I ask them to take out a coin and place it in my hand. I look at the date and have them verify the date. I act like I put it in my hand and close my hand into a fist. I have them hold onto my wrist to make sure that there is no way the coin could vanish. I talk to them for a moment (this creates time misdirection...another subject all together) and I recreate history. I say, "You took a coin out of your pocket. You checked the date. You placed it into my hand. You held my wrist. I never touched the coin except when you placed it into my hand, right? (They agree) Watch, because the coin has completely vanished." Satan uses this recreating history in the Garden of Eden. God says one thing, then Satan twists His words just slightly to recreate history. Crazy.

RM: So, what is time misdirection?

DR: Here's an example of time misdirection. Let's say that I wanted to vanish four coins from my hand and have them appear under a glass. I place them into my hand. When I close my fist they shoot up my sleeve, around my back and down to my other hand. I load them under the empty glass. But now I need to convince you that they are still in my closed fist. What if I placed a few coins up my sleeve? Now, when I shake my fist it sounds as if the coins are still in my closed fist. So, from the audience perspective I shake my fist they hear the coins, a moment later I open my fist and the coins "instantly" vanish and at that moment they appear under the glass. Because of the time misdirection, the vanish and the appearance of the coins seems to be instantaneous. In reality, it took much longer than it appeared to take. Time misdirection is the ability to make the magic appear instantaneous when it actually takes more time than it appears. There are lots of spiritual insights that can be drawn from this, but I will leave that to your imagination.

RM: Your gift of illusion might convey to some people that you have magical powers. What do you say to that?

DR: Depends how serious they are. Some people are very serious about this. They believe that a deck of cards is of the devil. They believe that making someone levitate is demonic, real, and absolutely impossible for it to be a trick. Most people understand that what I do uses sleight of hand and they could do it too with 20 years of practice. These conversations usually lead me to people's misconceptions, superstitions, and beliefs about the world around them. I try to help them to understand the difference between an illusion and demonic powers. I think sometimes people assume that if they don't know how something is done, it must be demonic. But, that is a crazy assumption. There are lots of things that I can't explain but I shouldn't just assume they're demonic.

RM: What do you think about Criss Angel and David Blaine?

DR: They are great performers. But I try to get people to understand that these guys don't just wake up one morning and go levitate across buildings, walk across the water or anything else. They *plan* out these events, they work with the best illusionists in the world and they have a huge budget! If it is real, why do they need to talk to the best illusionists (look at the credits), the best illusion builders and why do they need any money? Because...it's a trick.

RM: How many illusions do you have in your arsenal?

DR: I have approximately twenty that I perform week after week; maybe 50 to 100 that I can do on the spot if needed. If I looked back at everything I have ever done, there are hundreds.

RM: Why do you think so many people are intrigued by sleight of hand, illusion and magic?

DR: People love the mysterious. Everyone knows that certain things are impossible (floating an object, making something disappear, etc...). When we break the laws of nature there is an innate fascination with making the impossible seem real.

RM: You've talked about "redeeming magic". What does that mean?

Danny Ray: We need to redeem the word magic. In fact, there are many things in our culture we need to redeem. For instance, the rainbow. It is associated with the gay community, when it should be associated with the promises of God. Same with magic. When you go to Disneyland you have this magical experience of wonder and awe. God is the *creator* of wonder and awe. I help people see into the heart and mystery of God; the magic and wonder of who He is. Nobody will ever be able to explain God. There is a mystery to who He is. Paul says, 'we stare through dim glass.' The scripture reveals His heart, love, passion and character, but we still only have a faint view. When we get to heaven, we will be blown away.

RM: Is it difficult to bring a positive twist to something associated with evil?

DR: Yes. I wrestled with this for years. I didn't become a Christian until I was 17. It was then that I read about magicians and that they were going to hell. I was ready to give it up. As much as I love this art I will always love Jesus way more. After years of prayer and mentoring I came to the conclusion that God gave me this gift to fool and entertain people. I tread this ground very lightly. I think very carefully through my choice of illusions and the words I say. We will all be held accountable for our words and actions, so I need to be cautious that I don't step over the line.

RM: What is the future for Christian illusionists?

DR: I am training fifteen illusionists from around the country. Some of these guys are going to be phenomenal. Actually, there are many Christian illusionists. We need to figure out a way of training them theologically, as well as in the art of illusions.

RM: What new illusions are you working on?

DR: I am developing an escape that could be terrifying. I will be bound with locks, chains and other restraints on a metal board. On the opposite side from me are huge

spikes. A timer is set for one minute before the spikes will impale me. It has a surprise ending (let's just say I don't get out in time). It's fun coming up with this stuff. I hope to have this out in 2010.

RM: How long does it take before you bring an illusion to the stage?

DR: There are some illusions that I have been working on for years but haven't mastered yet. I researched and worked on my "ring in light bulb" routine for two years before I performed it at the Magic Castle. Last year I went back to the drawing board and worked out a totally different method. This version will be even more powerful than the first. Then there are other effects that might take a month or two to perfect.

RM: Do you have a favorite trick?

DR: My favorite trick changes from year to year. Right now the Chamber is my favorite. This is an underwater escape. It's my favorite because people have to face their fears and we have seen lots of people give their lives to Christ after they have witnessed this escape.

RM: A dream realized?

DR: Performing at the Magic Castle was a dream I had since childhood. That is definitely an accomplishment that reminds me that God fulfills our dreams.

You can learn more about Danny Ray at DannyRay.tv or Captivators.com. Check out his newest project at tenthdotministries.com.