

House Fire Chaos and Blessing

Preface

“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22).

This is a story about a family that was burned out of their house, and the journey God orchestrated to bless them in their tribulation. It is a story about a tragedy that was turned to adventure – through the supernatural grace of God. More than anything, it is a story of God’s unfailing and extravagant love!!

There are many types and degrees of tribulation. A house fire is a dramatic event that draws a lot of attention. However, we want to recognize that it does not compare to losing a spouse or child, getting cancer, losing your business, or many other difficult situations that befall the human race.

The “level” of our tribulation was established by God to manifest His glory and transform us more into the image of Christ. Others are honored and trusted with greater, and lesser, tribulation. Our hearts go out to those whose trials go on for years – even lifetimes. It is our prayer that these, and others, will be encouraged by our testimony of the Father’s faithfulness and His extravagant love.

While this story is not intended to be a spiritual lesson, we pray that others will learn from our experience. We know that the wisdom and revelation we were given in the journey is to be applied elsewhere; and not just for ourselves. In fact, God has given us a message for the church. We have titled it “Navigating a Crisis”, and offer it to anyone that is interested. For ourselves, we are still applying the lessons learned – being taught through its application in some new experiences.

As a last word of preface, let it be known that Beth, Sarah, Matthew and I have not “deserved” or “earned” anything that we had before the fire, anything we now have, or anything we’ve been given during this journey. Even the “right” decisions we made are a result of the Lord’s grace in teaching us how to hear His voice, trust Him, and obey His instruction.

Tragedy and the Supernatural

On April 18, 2009, Beth and I were returning from dinner when we received a phone call from our son, Matthew. At first we couldn’t understand him. Thinking we had a bad connection, we hung up and called back. About the time we heard him say, “fire”, we saw smoke billowing from the direction of our home – the home where all our memories were kept; the home where we had raised our children!

It is hard to describe the feelings you have standing and watching your home burn. In that moment, life had turned surreal. Time seemed to stand still... and rush by. Ultimately, the house was destroyed by the fire, smoke and water. Praise God, Sarah was off at college! Praise God, Matthew got out alive and physically unharmed! Praise God, we had not been asleep when the fire started! The Lord Jesus is truly our Savior!!

Friends and neighbors came with comfort and aide – instruments of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Helper. Somehow they understood what we really needed. Praise God, He brings peace in the midst of chaos!! And then He showed up in a supernatural way.

Somewhere in the midst of this “tragedy-in-progress”, God whispered into our hearts, “I am sovereign. Nothing happens outside of my will. I am a good God, I love you, and I have a plan for you. Reckon it in your hearts.” And so we did; and we continued to remind each other to reckon it as true. He also told us to grieve the loss. At the time, we did not understand the importance of this step, but by His grace we obeyed. It was a decisive act. Praise God for His rhema (right now) word!

The Pivotal Moment

As Beth and I “settled” into our first temporary quarters (the Holiday Inn Express), we turned to our Heavenly Father in prayer. Beth began, “Father God, whatever you have for us in this, we receive it.” This was the surrender He was looking for – it opened up the storehouse of Heaven. With one word (our “whatever”), we had entered into the purpose of Almighty God. Our tragedy immediately became an adventure. Praise God for His encouragement in the prayers of a godly wife!

Comfort and Aide

As we mentioned, many neighbors and friends reached out with comfort and aide. Neighbors we had never met and friends that just “happened to be driving by”. From the fire fighters to the Red Cross, God’s grace was poured out on us in a tremendous way – the first evidence of His extravagant love. And it didn’t stop on the night of the fire: Gift cards for Matthew from his friends and the faculty of Heirway Christian School; clothes, soap, deodorant, meals and cold hard cash from Beth’s friends in the Douglas County School System; and meals from our family at New River Community Church. Praise God, His encouragement that everything was going to be alright was just, well, supernatural!

The Evidence of God’s Orchestration

Before continuing, it’s only fair to warn the reader that the following is filled with seemingly small and inconsequential facts. We capture them here as evidence of God’s careful and exquisite orchestration. Perhaps they are only understood by those that have been through similar journeys. Our prayer is that this testimony will help others recognize when God is doing the same for them (orchestrating). It will make the adventure more exciting, and less fearful. Praise God, His eye is on the sparrow and He does know the number of hairs on our heads!

The first bit of orchestration came via a phone call from some friends at church. Their neighbors were currently on an extended mission assignment in New Orleans – helping to direct the clean-up from Hurricane Katrina – and were willing to let us use their home. Within two days we were out of the hotel and into a comfortable home. Praise God, He allowed us to be a part of His working all things to the good of those who love Him, and are called to His purpose!

Being blessed with a comfortable home gave us time to address some important issues. One of those was replacing our truck, which had been fuel for the fire. We can't explain it – and, as we mentioned earlier, we didn't deserve it – but the Lord saw fit to provide a 2003 Nissan Frontier for approximately half its estimated cost.

And as if that wasn't enough of an "I've got you covered" from the Lord, there was the Overlook at Riverpointe blessing. You see, we really needed a place to live that was closer to Matthew's school, and our burned house. Had we been in a hurry, we would not have experienced the connection God made between one of Beth's co-workers and the builder that had just finished their new home. Long story made short, we were able to move into a brand new house within a few miles of our burned house.

BTW: We were graced with the wisdom and provision to have insurance that would pay for this temporary housing and the furniture that provided comfortable living conditions. Contrary to the stories we had heard, we were having a gift of God experience with our insurance company. We have never heard of anyone having the supernatural favor that we have had with them.

And now our eyes were wide open to God's adventure. We began looking for ways to share what the Lord was doing. It was at this time that He gave the "Navigating a Crisis" teaching. He also allowed us to minister encouragement into many people's lives. For example, our new builder-landlord was having a very difficult time getting along with, and receiving payment from, one of his customers. The Lord led me to pray that the supernatural peace and joy in his heart would so impact his customer that the relationship would completely change. Guess what? The customer caught up on his payments and even went so far as to praise him for his work.

God's orchestration is truly amazing – not only in the day-to-day, but over the long term. Has there ever been a time when the existing house market was so much more attractive than the build-new market? Consequently, the reconstruction cost of our existing home was so high that the Insurance Adjuster allowed us to begin shopping around for something we could move in to immediately. Talk about the Lord giving you the desires of your heart! This was exactly what we needed.

The search for a new home began with another unusual circumstance. Beth tried to call an agent that was listed on a house we were interested in. However, it was the weekend and we had to "settle for" the Realtor on call. Reluctantly, we agreed to meet with him. We soon discovered that God had provided us with the most professional and selfless Realtor we had ever met. Imagine that!!

The Realtor first showed us a house in Chestatee Farms – a foreclosure that would have normally been out of our price range. It was a museum of a house, big enough for two or three families, on four acres of land. It didn't feel like "home", but we felt encouraged by the Lord to pursue it. In the process, the Insurance Adjuster agreed to commit another \$15,000 to fix any damage to this or any other property we bought. And so, with what we were allotted by the Adjuster, we submitted what would be one of three bids being considered by the foreclosure management company. A decision would come in four days.

God Speaks Again

Early in the morning on the day we were to find out about the Chestatee Farms “museum”, the Lord awakened me to come meet Him in prayer. The moment my knees hit the floor, the Lord said, “I am not going to give you the house. I am going to give you more. But you will have to trust Me with this one.” And so, we were very excited (and not at all surprised) to hear that we lost the bid. But what was the “more” about? How was that possible?

The Lord encouraged me that the “trust me with this one” meant letting go of finding a home with acreage (like we had with our burned house). This freed us to begin looking at homes in subdivisions. Our Realtor was very patient with us in this change of direction, but probably a bit confused and concerned with our insistence on looking at “more” sized properties (we weren’t brave enough to tell him about the “more” message).

Our Failing Patience

If it was going to happen, we wanted to get into a new home before Beth started back to work. But things weren’t working out like we expected. One offer after another was refused. We placed a bid on a beautiful property in the Riverwalk Subdivision. Beth loved it, but the owners flat out refused our bid; even calling us (outside of protocol) to tell us they just couldn’t accept such a disparate offer. Time was running out. As the weeks went by, we became more doubtful about the “more” message.

It was now July, and we were getting antsy. To be transparently honest, gone was the “more” adventure, replaced by a desperate search for something “acceptable”. Oh, how quickly we can lose focus on, and trust in, the Faithful One.

And so, with our impatience getting the best of us, we placed a bid on a foreclosed house that we felt could be upgraded to meet our needs. Our Realtor called the next day with the news that our bid had been accepted. But there was something more – praise God for on-time surprises!

Our Impatience Meets God’s Perfect Timing

When God brings an adventure to its closure, He often does so quickly – so quick that it takes your breath away. We didn’t know it at the time, but He was working the timing out so that we would know it was all in His hands – even in our moment of doubt and self-decision.

When our Realtor said, “Your bid has been accepted, but something very strange has happened”, my heart jumped. It was electric, like God had dropped in an anticipation and answer at the same time. “The owners of the Riverwalk house have changed their minds and would like to sell you the house (for the amount we offered), if you are still interested.” Were we still interested? It was all I could do not to throw down the phone and run around the room, hoopin’ and hollerin’ (I did that later).

Beth and Sarah were out shopping when I called them. If I had known they were in the car, I would have waited. It's a wonder they didn't dance the car right off the road. Praise God for His extravagant joy!!

The Sum of God's Blessing (So Far)

At the closing, the owners told us that they had been puzzled and frustrated that their beautiful home had not sold for more than two years; and then they said, "Now we know that He was holding it for you." Praise God for His divine orchestration!! They even came over to the house to show us how things worked and how they had decorated it. They left after praying a blessing over our new home and our family. Praise God for the Body of Christ!!

As you can see, the sum of God's blessing in this adventure cannot be measured in dollars, square footage, etc. But God has blessed us in practical ways that we would like to recognize:

1. He moved us into a house that is twice the size of our burned home – still with nothing owed (we were out of debt before the fire);
2. He provided an additional \$15,000 for repairs – a house without maintenance for two years needs more repairs than you might think;
3. He razed and removed our burned house – though it's still weird to think that our home and belongings are buried somewhere; and,
4. He left us with the 7.8 acres we had with our burned home – His response to Rob's trust; and the over-the-top evidence of His extravagant love!!

We believe the blessings of this adventure are not over for us, and for those our new home will be used to bless. We are holding this gift loosely, because we know it is God's possession. We ask that you pray for us to be good stewards with our new home.

Epilogue

Ironically, this tragedy has also been used by God to bring healing. The last three years have been challenging for us. At times we have felt torn apart by circumstances, fears and disappointments. But God has used this "tragedy-turned-adventure" to bring us together – in the shadow of His extravagant love. Could that be God's intention in every tribulation? That has truly been our experience. It is the "God working all things to the good of those that love Him and are called to His purpose."

We pray that in all things, you will also know the love, grace and power He desires to manifest in your lives.

In His Abounding Grace,

Rob, Beth, Sarah and Matthew