

MORE MIRACLES

“And these signs and wonders shall follow...”. Mark 16:17

Out on a branch

Have you ever stepped out into the wild blue yonder of the unknown? Found yourself floundering and falling and failing before you called on the Lord?

Welcome to my world.

If you're too reasonable, too mature to get yourself into such a situation, please let me remind you that “Before they call out, I'll answer.” Isaiah 65:24



God knows everything I'm going to get into before I do it, He knew it even before I was born. And a lot of the things I didn't see coming came from Him. Just sayin.

He is God.

My husband moved out when Chloe was born, he hadn't signed up to be a dad. His job as apartment management of a small community about five blocks from our home came with an apartment. Very close but we seldom saw him.

How exciting it was when, out of the blue, he called and suggested a family barbeque! Beautiful summer evening, he'd bring the food. I was so excited.

Greg arrived and it was pretty normal but to me, miraculous. He did the family dad thing and went right to work starting up the barbeque. The busy work kept him from being too uncomfortable. As the sun set, I finally saw a bright and warm family future. I would belong.

When the burgers were nearly done, we started to hear fire engines. Lots of fire engines. I listened because they were so close and then stopped. I saw a huge glow in the darkening sky. “Greg! They're at your place!” And we took off.

The entire complex of 24 apartments was ablaze. Greg's office and apartment were a separate building and untouched, but everything else was a roaring fire.

Folks were trapped on the second floor and one by one hung on the balcony railings then dropped down. Children, mothers, men, a very pregnant woman, Karen. Seeing it on the news is horrifying but seeing it happen live is beyond words.

The residents were scuttled across the railroad tracks into the smalltown train station for shelter. The Red Cross was called. I ran home to get blankets, baby bottles and bibles.

And there was Greg asleep on the couch. I didn't stop to talk, still carrying the baby I rushed back to the train station with supplies.

The Red Cross gave each household three days in a motel.



Wonderful, but can you imagine finding a new place to live in three days, and with no money? Residents had just paid their rent and had very little left over.

I passed out the meager things that I had. I tried to console the residents, but traumatized people really can't hear and I'm not sure I had the right words, either. But I had the right God.

Most of them had lost everything, *absolutely everything*. Ashes. No one had insurance. In a low-income property, most survived on a cycle of benefits>pay rent>barter for drugs with food stamps. And this was a very low-income property.

Exhausted, traumatized, weakened and frantic, what would they do in three days when the Red Cross help expired?

"God will provide. God will give you new homes. Saturday at noon, everyone meet at my place. We'll have a picnic and God will give you new homes." Scared out of my mind and: prophetic.

Well, what would you have said?

About 11:30PM, baby and I returned home, Greg was gone.

The next morning, I asked my boss, Donny, a lifetime resident of Merced, "Who's the biggest landlord here in low-income apartments? Really cheap rent?"

"Oh, that'd be Finch. He owns places everywhere and they're really cheap, but so is he. He isn't gonna help ya. He's also known as the meanest man in Merced."

"Oh well, thanks!"

On my lunch hour, I drove over to meet the mean Mr. Finch.

No appointment, I just showed up and introduced myself and my baby. Quickly I explained the need for 24 apartments, with no move-in fees, no security deposit, no background checks, no full month's rent. Prorated rent for the remaining days of the month, and give them the keys. Please.

"I can do that," Finch.

"You can? You will? *Twenty-four?*"

"Yes."

"In two days?"

"Yes."

We shook hands. "Mean" Mr. Finch, I thought he was just lovely.

That was it. No letter of reference, no business card, just me and my baby and the favor of God. This is how good God is.

Wow! We drove back to work and I told Donny what had happened and he was dumbfounded.

One problem, one very big problem: No one had any money even for prorated rent. They were broke and every document or asset they may have had was hidden in smoking rubble. And I certainly had no answers.

"I GIVE YOU BEAUTY FOR ASHES,"

I didn't see the residents again during the countdown to the picnic.

They didn't know me, did they even know where I lived? Doubt it. The countdown was not in hours but in minutes at the most, wondering how God was going to accomplish: *money*.

It was not joyful curiosity; it was "What-have-I-done?"

"What am I going to do? Oh my gosh!"

How silly, it's never ever about "What am I going to do?" No matter what you do, you can fail. Unforeseen circumstances, poor planning, a drought, whatever. But for God, every circumstance is seen in advance and He is El Shaddai, The Perfect Planner. Never rely on yourself, always rely on God.

Friday night I started to cook, wondering if anyone was going to come the next day, *noon omgoodness noon*. I made mountains of potato salad, baked a truckload of chicken, I remember baked beans, drinks, paper plates, plastic dinnerware and

cups. And cake. And fear of being foolish, going to all this expense and thinking no one would show up to eat it. Almost hoping no one would show up because I had no apartments for them.

The busy work helped distract me from terror.

In these two and a half days, not a word, not one peep from God about the money.

I had no brilliant thoughts, like "Well, I'll just go to the City of Merced", or "I'll go to the Full Gospel Business Men's Association", no, not a thought. I didn't need a decisionmaking process or a committee review, I needed *cash*.

Saturday arrived.

I'm ready with the picnic and no solution. Yes, a miraculous offer of 24 apartments, but no money to move them in. Ah, but maybe no one would show up and call me on my bluff – that's how it feels when you're starting out with a mustard seed and just God.



Then in they came, *all of them*.

A typical household was made up of single moms, lots of little ones, and unauthorized male residents, all unemployed, several on parole. These were rough folks if you look at them with your eyes. They had tattoos on top of their tattoos way before ink was cool. And they weren't friendly, excited and *hopeful*, and I had no answer.

So, I served up the picnic. I blessed it with prayer: "Father God, thank You for this food and for our new homes. In Jesus Name."

Well, they were hungry, they saw I was trying to help, and they had absolutely no expectation other than being homeless that Saturday night. In a couple of hours.

While I was running around serving, carrying the baby with me, the front door bell rang. I think this was the first time I had heard it ring, so this, too, was a curiosity.

Opening the door, here stood two men in suits. OK,

“Are you Mrs. Branson?”

“Yes.”

“Are you Greg’s wife?”

“Yes.”

“We’re the owners of the Desert Apartments. We’d like to get inside the office there but we can’t find your husband.” Ah, we had common ground.

“But you can go in, legally, because you’re his wife. You can enter through a window and then as his wife, open the door and give us legal entry. Will you help us?”

“Yes, of course. I wonder if you could help me, too.”

I explained to them that I had arranged for apartments for the residents, but had no money to get them in. And I mentioned that “they” just happened to “all” be in my back yard.

“If I can find the rent roll for the month, can you give them an immediate refund of their rents so they can move?”

“Yes.”

“It’s Saturday. Could you please call their new landlord and assure him that you will pay their prorated rents?”

“Yes.”

I want you to visualize me giving my new refugee friends the news that *all of them would have their own homes, their own keys, tonight.*

God invaded our lives to do the impossible. We were all walking in a dream.

These weren’t churchy folks. These weren’t God’s folks, except that “I will say to those people who were not My people, “You are My people.” And they shall say, “You are my God!” Hosea 2:23

"For He is kind to the unthankful and the evil. Luke 6:35

And He is kind to me.

Amen.

"I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing." John 15:5



Raul's Dad

"raise the dead". Matthew 10:8

It's funny what you remember.

Everyone remembers things slightly differently, we all have pictures in our minds. It's really incongruent what I remember most of a rather dramatic experience.

He wore the biggest, cowboyiest belt buckle, gold, that I had ever seen. It's amazing he didn't topple over from its weight. So, we'll get to that

soon.

There was a sudden, crazy pounding on my door, desperate: Joy! Joy! Come! My father is dead!

It was Raul from downstairs. He was very friendly and eagerly spoke what American he could, his father and mother were both pleasant and friendly and we couldn't exchange a single word. So, I knew them all but didn't really know them.



They didn't know me, either, except the friendly part.

I followed Raul racing down the stairs, into their apartment, into the bedroom.

I have absolutely no medical training but the diagnosis was clear: the man is dead. His coloring was strange, there were tiny bubbles at the corners of his blue lips. His chest didn't move. His eyes were open and strange and unresponsive.

Without missing a beat, I put my fingers on his wrist, I touched him, and there was no pulse at all, none, and I said

"Jesus! Give him a heartbeat!" And immediately there was a strong pulse.

Not a weak pulse increasing gradually, a booming pulse.

I touched him. "Lay hands on the sick and they will recover." Jesus said it. Mark 16:17-18

Did you notice that I wrote "and I said "Jesus!" and not "I prayed"? I hadn't stopped to consider or think it through, or pray anything "the right way". At the time, I had "walked with The Lord" about three and a half minutes and I 'knew nothing'. But I knew Jesus.

When I talk to Jesus or He talks to me, we are praying, yes? Yes. Having a conversation with God is called 'prayer'.

Sometimes it begins with worship exalting Him, and that's good. Other times I just talk and He talks. And the best prayers I ever pray is when I just listen to Him. And we do this a lot. And we laugh a lot.

Because He wants it that way. He wants me to talk to Him. He wants to talk to me. Many, many times, He answers without me calling on Him. This is Jesus who loves *you*.

Back to Raul's dad.

Now his chest moved up and down, he had a strong heartbeat.

"Raul, call 911!"

"I did, they are coming."

Sure enough, paramedics arrived, bundled Raul's dad onto the gurney and took off with sirens screaming.

I drove Raul and his mother and we followed.

Raul's dad was in ICU and we were permitted to join him.

What I still remember is the little screen going blip, blip, blip as an orange line graph went up and down on it.

Suddenly, the little screen sang one solid note and the orange line went solid flat.



Medical staff rushed in "What happened?"

Then came a frantic young doctor. He had dirty blond, shaggy hair, jeans, cowboy boots and the biggest belt buckle I had ever seen under his white coat.

"What happened?"

Mrs. Raul's Dad, Raul and I had nothing to say. We knew nothing.

So, there was lots and lots of activity, resuscitating measures and the paddles and still the little screen sang its one note and its orange line stayed flat.

"He was doing fine when he arrived. What happened? What happened before he came in?"

I explained that all I knew was seeing him not breathing and finding no pulse.

"Then what? Then what happened?"

"I prayed."

"Do it again!"

I prayed.

The little screen went back to its blip, blip, blip song and its orange line started climbing up and down again.

The doctor stared at me.

I stared at his belt buckle.



Notes:

You probably have this figured out, but for those who don't know me: I am very ordinary. I am ordinary and extraordinary things happen around me.

And this is because on my best day I can do nothing, but Jesus can a-ny-thing.

On my worst day, Jesus can.

"For we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power might be seen to be of God and not of ourselves." 2 Corinthians 4:7

Whatever my condition or circumstances, Jesus delights in doing good things for me and *through* me.

"...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." Acts 10:38

He interrupts, He breaks in, He breaks through and He breaks out of the impossible.

To do good.

And He just loves it!

"I rejoice over doing you good!"

Jeremiah 32:41 (JEJ)

Well, that'll never happen...

"faith as a mustard seed" Matthew 17:20

I'll pray for anyone who asks me to pray. My privilege.

And one of my favorite risky behaviors is to pray for someone who hasn't asked without asking them.

Just start praying.

I'm a small, unscary person and no one has clobbered me yet.

So, I see this man out in the hot sun with a hand-push wheelchair. I pull over and park, get out, approach with a kind of goofy, folksy smile.

Maybe not all that bright but certainly not dumb enough to say “Sooooo, how ya doin?” because he’s clearly not doing very well. His face is more than sunburnt, it’s tanned leather.

The hands pushing his wheelchair are cracked and bleeding.

In this case I wanted to honor his dignity and asked, “How can I pray for you?” “I’m homeless. I really want an electric wheelchair.”

“OK! Great, but I’m going to ask God to heal you, too.”

He didn’t get angry, he wasn’t offended, he just pulled up one pant leg. “Doctors say I’ll never walk again.”

As I looked at that one leg, I could see his point.

But I prayed, asking for an electric wheelchair and complete healing. I hadn’t yet taken Curry Blake’s *Divine Healing Technician* training, JGLM.org, John G. Lake Ministries, so all I knew to do was ask Him.

Having prayed, I said “Hi, I’m Sis. When I see you, I’ll pull over and park and pray. What’s your name?”

“Montana.”

“OK, Montana, good to know you. I love you. See ya soon.”

As I drove off I thought how impossible it would be for him to hook up with services: no home, no cellphone for contact and not enough vigor to hope. And no good legs. I wasn’t thinking about God at all, just that I wanted to cry for Montana.

Every once in a while I’d see Montana, stop and pray. I wonder what was going through his mind. He never asked me for money, information about me, or anything else.

This went on some time and then one day, wonder of wonders, there’s Montana styling down the road with a bright shiny new red electric wheelchair. Whaaaat?



So, I flagged him down before I parked because he was tooling pretty fast and really enjoying himself.

His hands weren't cracked and bleeding anymore, his face was still very weathered but he was smiling. And we prayed. And so it went for maybe three years.

Then one day I walked into 7-Eleven.

This photo says it all.



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