

No Fear Just Love

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Three Girls

We had our license from the state less than a week when the agency called and asked if we could take three girls. What? Three? We had never discussed the idea of bringing three new faces into our home!

Since I was at work, I said I needed to talk to Brent before making this sort of decision. A few minutes later, an aide unexpectedly walked in the classroom and asked if I needed help. What a relief! After the call, I was flustered, couldn't concentrate on teaching math, and needed to make a big decision quickly. I excused myself from the room, called Brent, and briefly discussed the idea. We decided that we were willing to give it a try.

We didn't want to see three siblings be separated from each other. They had just lost their regular routine and family. We didn't want them to lose the companionship of their sisters also.

They were the only ones ever placed in our home. God has a way of slowly preparing us for challenges ahead. God knows exactly what we need to be encouraged as we take each new step. We had no way of knowing, but that one decision would have an unimaginable impact on our lives. There would be both joy and pain.

Free Diving

This is a controversial subject. I am writing about it anyways. This book is called No Fear, Just Love for a reason. I'm not sugar-coating experiences just because it might make you or me feel uncomfortable. If you think I've gone beyond your ability to relate or if you get too queasy, simply turn to the next chapter. It's OK.

Before I get into my main topic, I may be beating around the bush a little bit here, I'd like to talk about dishes. Yes. Dishes. Dishes all serve the same purpose. Fine china is expensive and delicate, but pleasant to the eye. Antique dishes are desired because of their rare and historical qualities. New sets of dishes are routinely sold in stores so that many can keep kitchens and dining rooms looking fresh.

This leads me to dishes that are less desirable and cheaper to get. They can be found at a thrift shop or yard sale. For a big discount, you can get the dishes that were in someone else's cupboard a few days earlier but are no longer wanted. There's one step lower. For free, you can find sets of dishes in a dumpster. Not selling in the time allowed, the store must make room for the new stock.

Perhaps you believe that thrift stores are only for the poor and dumpsters only for useless trash. Perhaps you believe that the only preowned thing that you might ever want to own is a rare antique or something that has been with your family for a very long time. Overall, we appear to appreciate the very new and very old things. Everything in the middle seems to lose value.

If you know your family has been blessed with plenty, free diving is probably not for you. If you find yourself not satisfied with your own belongings, but would never look in a dumpster, I dare to suggest that you are already blessed and just don't realize it. If your family struggles with meeting expenses, this may be an

untapped blessing that your family has overlooked. Maybe after reading this, you will find new ways to cut costs and will never peek into a dumpster... or you might be one of the few who tries it.

Free diving, also called dumpster diving, has been a part of my family's life for about six years. Our family has been blessed because we have been willing to accept this resource. In many areas, it is perfectly legal. If you have any questions about the legalities of this in your local area, please do your own research. To go diving, there are some challenges. You must rid yourself of preconceived ideas attached to dumpsters and your own reputation. You must humble yourself. Don't get me wrong, there many ways to practice humility. Free diving is just one avenue.

Free divers use and share things that have been discarded as trash. These things are going to a landfill if someone doesn't salvage them. Many times, the difference between paying retail or retrieving for free is an hour in time and the location of the product. If I told you the things I've seen, you would probably have a difficult time believing me. Sometimes, it is only when you see the waste with your own eyes that you can really understand.

There are people around the world who barely have enough food to feed themselves or their families. It is their reality every day. God loves all of us. Perhaps you have been blessed so that you can help others. Imagine inhabitants of a refugee camp thinking of everything our society throws away. If your children were hungry, would it be hard for you to forgive people who throw away food and never look your way? God expects the poor to forgive the rich. It's not easy.

My family decided to take diving more seriously, but not to help those less fortunate than ourselves. We were trying to save money for a bigger piece of

land. In less than a year, we saved half of the money that we anticipated needing for a down payment simply by eliminating most of our grocery expenses.

Usually, when Brent returned home with salvaged goods, he was giddy with excitement. It was a treasure hunt. There were the predictable items with a short shelf life, but there were almost always surprises. One time, Brent came home with many emotions, but cheerfulness was not one of them. He was sad, angry and frustrated. That evening, my family found approximately \$800.00 worth of ham in a dumpster. We researched online to try to understand why there was so much of one product in one dumpster. We found an article that answered our question.

The ham was not pink enough. What? In the processing facility, not enough red dye had been added to the ham. When cooked, the ham did not look quite as pink as normal. Some customers had complained. As a result, the company recalled all the ham that lacked the proper amount of red dye. I didn't even know there was dye in ham. Because the weather was cold when the ham was thrown out, it was still cold when it was discovered. Our freezers and refrigerator were packed to capacity with ham. We cautiously asked around hoping to share the abundance, but only found two other people who would accept a gift from a dumpster. We enjoyed several big ham dinners per month for over a year. What a blessing!

In Luke Chapter 6, we find Jesus and his disciples eating grain from the wheat field that had been left for the poor. Jesus had the ability to perform a miracle to produce food for Himself and His followers. Yet, Jesus chose to eat the scraps. Why didn't he just make a feast appear? Perhaps He wanted to set an example.

A Rock and a Hard Place

Nearly 3 years after the girls came to stay with us, they were available to adopt. We wanted to adopt them, but there was a big obstacle in our path. Three people with the legal authority told us that we could not adopt them until after Desi had her surgery. This might not seem like an unreasonable demand or an obstacle to most, but Desi didn't want the surgery.

Desi was born with a cleft palate and had undergone numerous surgeries in her young life to correct issues so that she could eat and breath normally. The plastic surgeon said that the upcoming surgery was reconstructive cosmetic surgery. Doctors confirmed that previous surgeries had been successful and that she was "fully functional." The new surgery would allow her to "erase the past" and "blend." Once completed, anyone looking at Desi would not be able to tell that she had ever had a cleft palate.

Desi had done her own research and did not want the potential risks and certain pain that she would have to endure. During the surgery, they would skin out Desi's upper lip to see the bone. Then they would get extra bone by drilling into her hip and removing some. The doctor would break the bone in her upper jaw and insert the bone that had been extracted. She would not be able to eat solid food for 3 months. It was expected that her mouth would probably hurt for 6-8 months. She would also have trouble walking for 6 months to a year while her hip healed. Then, we were told, she'd be beautiful.

The last sentence really bothered me. Who determines the standard of beauty needed to justify surgery for someone against their own will? Desi is already beautiful. If you can't see it, you need different eyesight. It's that simple. It seemed as if we couldn't win. Finally, Desi was able to express her thoughts, feelings, and research with someone having legal influence. Shortly thereafter, we were able to adopt the three sisters.

We had absolutely no power. Only God could intervene to change the hearts of those involved.

The Giving Tree

God gave me a strange dream. The setting was an unfamiliar room in a dark building. There were clothes hanging on circular racks like you would see in a retail store. There was no plot or characters. It seemed boring and invoked no feelings in me. Why would I have, and then remember, such a drab dream? What was its significance?

Brent and I had just adopted three girls. We were considering relocating and wanted to reduce our carbon footprint. We looked for communities known for having people with similar goals. In our online research, we found a place that we wanted to see in person. We wondered if the online presence was an accurate reflection of reality. It was time for a road trip.

Nearing our destination, we ran across a little thrift shop called The Giving Tree. Intrigued, I wanted to stop. I didn't want or need anything, I just wanted to check it out. Everyone in the car agreed.

The business had a confusing setup. The store consisted of three separate buildings but there was just one place to pay. The first building had three doors. The door on the right went to a separate, but more upscale thrift shop. The middle door was an apartment. The door on the left was open and had a handmade sign directing potential customers to pay for items in that room at the third building. Who does this? Aren't they afraid that someone will steal something? Nope. The unique community that I was looking for, the one that I wanted to know if it was real, yes... it's real.

Seeing a dark room with lots of used clothing, most in our group went to the other building to look around. Desi quickly grabbed a dress she liked and joined the others. Not me! Just one glance and I recognized the room as the place in my

dream. I saw nothing interesting for sale, but my curiosity had been sparked. The room was exactly as I had seen it. I investigated. What was special about this place?

Why was it dark? When I stepped into the room, I saw a sign by the light switch. It told people to turn off the light when leaving. It is logical, but what business in America does this? To me, it seemed like a lawsuit waiting to happen. Perhaps the owner wasn't worried about that. I was in an area where people are concerned about conserving everything... electricity, clothes, building materials, and anything else you can imagine. The business provided a service to the community. Personal convictions outweighed typical business plans. It was a place that locals could get used items for next to nothing.

With the help of a single lightbulb providing light, I saw a sign for a restroom. I still couldn't see what was so special about this place. Unusual... yes. Worth a dream? I didn't see the importance. My family had plenty of clothes and our vehicle was already full. Since we had been traveling for a while, I took the opportunity to use the restroom located in the back of the room. It looked like it had not been updated since the building was built, but it was functional. I realized my own judgmental attitude and scolded myself.

Just as I was about to leave the bathroom and turn out the light, I looked down and saw a box of books just outside of the bathroom sitting on the floor. On the top of the stack of books was a copy of my dad's favorite book, aside from the Bible. When my dad passed away, my mom asked if I wanted anything that belonged to my dad. I wanted the book I had read so many years earlier.

About 15 years had passed since then. I had been wondering how to pass down one book to five children. Now I had two books. Perhaps during my lifetime, I would "find" three more. Now I knew why this room was significant! Well, not quite.

About three years later, I had a revelation. My mom had also asked my sister what she wanted from my dad. Out of everything, she had asked for the same book! My mom gave it to me because I was the “first born.” One day, it just occurred to me that the book was not for my children at all. It was for my sister. The message of the book is to “keep working on love.” If I held on to the book just because I was born first, that wasn’t love. I was led to that spot in the thrift store. If I had not had the dream, I wouldn’t have gone inside. Our car was already full, and I didn’t want any more clothes. The books were in the very back of the room.

I gave my sister my dad’s copy and kept the one I found. Sometimes I have wondered why a book would be so important. Perhaps it’s not the book. Maybe it’s the message to “keep working on love.”

A Premonition

Over the past 3 decades, students in the local school district have been consolidated into fewer buildings to reduce operating costs. Historically, voters in our area just would not pass a levy. At one point, the state of Ohio was even willing to contribute most of the money needed to construct new schools because our facilities were some of the worst in the state. Voters needed to agree to just a small increase to pay for the small portion with local taxes. The levy failed.

Time marched on. As voters, we had missed our chance less than 10 years earlier for the state to pay for much of a new school. Times had changed. Big industries and revenue miraculously poured into the area. The district no longer qualified for any grants. The district tried to pass another levy that would require much more from the local people. For some reason though, I had a feeling that the levy was going to pass. It did.

But... I thought I'd never be a teacher in this new building. I didn't know why. I often wondered where I would find new employment. Logically, I surmised that I would be working in different district. I updated my resume, gathered copies of my credentials, and began filling out applications.

I felt a calling. I didn't and still don't know exactly what that calling is, but it is a feeling that I am supposed to be doing something else somewhere else. For several years, I have felt that God has wanted me to have a different job, but I have been at a loss for direction. I have struggled to hear His voice concerning this. I really liked the job that I had, and I wanted to continue teaching somewhere in Ohio because I didn't want my retirement benefits to be negatively impacted.

I was put limits on where I would go because of my perception that my retirement was important. I had the illusion that my work and my savings would care for me as I aged. I was not dependent on God at all for blessings or health. I could do it by myself. I had good medical coverage and a steady job to support my needs. Compared to others in my area, I had frugal spending habits and had little debt. By my own power, I worked toward a sustainable future for both myself and my children. I suspected hardship was coming in future years. I wanted to be prepared. I wanted my kids to have the supplies, knowledge, and practice to know how to survive in a more dangerous and extreme world.

Then administration met with the teachers' union without lawyers and came to an agreement in one day. To some with negotiation experience, that is a miracle by itself. Teachers would get a 4%, 4%, and 4% raise over the next three years. I'd be crazy to leave now. There had been many years that I had taken a pay freeze along with the other teachers because we understood that there was simply not enough money to offer anything more.

I didn't want to leave. I loved my job, my students, my coworkers, the parents, and the community. I was very comfortable. The school where I taught was being honored at the state level because of our improvements. I could wait one more year. My resume was almost perfect. I was part of leadership teams for both the building and the district. I determined that I would close out my time with the district with the closing of the school. The school had one more academic year before the new building was completed and the old one torn down. It seemed like perfect timing. The problem was that it wasn't God's timing.

A Healing

On a very warm March day, my family decided to do some work on some land that we owned. Nature had taken its toll over the winter months and the driveway needed some maintenance. Using our old dump truck and a tractor, my husband unloaded the gravel slowly. I worked with a rake to smooth it out. My body started hurting because I had not been as physically active during the winter months. The “younger generation” was taking over more of the physical tasks.

I expected to feel better in a few days. Days turned into weeks and weeks into months. Instead, the pain got worse. Never one to miss work and proud of my stockpile of sick days, I took over the counter pain reliever 3 times per day. I still had pain, but it was reduced enough to be able to complete my job. My teaching style was modified to minimize physical exertion. Even with medicine, the pain intensified and was now visibly affecting my mobility. A few of my co-workers asked if I was OK. I lied by saying I was fine, just recovering. The opposite was true. My condition continued to deteriorate.

One day while at work, my leg started to tingle. That got my attention very quickly. Pain was one thing. The tingling scared me. I googled “tingling leg” and didn’t like the search results. With a general mistrust for the pharmaceutical and medical communities, I searched for a more holistic approach and tried chiropractic care. Not about to be man handled, I found a female chiropractor within driving distance. My voice must have conveyed my desperation to the secretary because she suggested an appointment for that afternoon.

I didn’t know what to expect. After my paperwork was finished, I started looking around the waiting room. Its interesting information put me into sensory overload. The radio played a soft mix of music that included my favorites. Quietly, via closed captioned services, a documentary about monoculture farming practices and the pesticides used to combat increasingly resilient weeds played

on the TV. A rack held magazines that offered healthy choices for me personally and for the environment. On a different wall was an assortment of laminated medical articles. I wanted to absorb it all at once.

When the doctor was ready, she listened to my symptoms. Pressure on my sciatic nerve was causing the tingling sensation. I had other problems, loads of pain, and mobility issues, but after she “worked on me,” the scary tingling was gone. I was grateful and left in a daze.

Almost to the end of the school year, I forced myself to make it through May. Then, I would rest and heal during the summer months. With flawed thinking, I only acknowledged physical exertion as the reason for pain. Unrecognized at the time, complex elements for disaster gathered in and around me... chemical, physical, and psychological stressors. Worst of all, my spiritual life was in limp mode.

The school year ended with my hobbling about. More rest didn't help. Neither did more chiropractic visits. Instead of getting better, my pain increased. Baffled and humbled, I went to a medical doctor. When the doctor hit my knee with a hammer type of medical tool, nothing happened. She hit it again. Again, no response. Lab results showed that 17 of 35 categories were “out of range.” I was anemic, low on Vitamin D, and my nerves were not responding properly.

Over time, increased dosages for the nerve medicine, Gabapentin, were prescribed. Potential side effects were nightmares and suicide. The doctor also gave me Naproxen, with possible long-term side effects including an increased risk for a stroke and gastrointestinal bleeding. The point of going to the doctor for medicine was to prevent damage from my reliance on over-the-counter pain killers.

My chiropractor was concerned by the increased dosages of medicine, but it was obvious that things were not getting better. The recommended stretches only made me feel worse. She talked about the 3 kinds of stress: emotional, physical, and chemical. After 27 months of loving three foster girls, we were told that we would be able to adopt them... only after the oldest had a surgery she didn't want. There's emotional stress. My original overexertion of raking had been a physical stressor that had worsened dramatically with time. I thought chemical stressors were absent. Not a smoker or a drinker, I was oblivious to preservatives and chemicals hiding in food, pop, and treated water.

What had originally started out as just back pain now had moved to include my joints... especially my knees. Soon after, my entire body hurt, a trait of undiagnosed fibromyalgia. My summer break had arrived and instead of enjoying it with my family, I was lucky just to walk from the bedroom to the living room. What was the point and how long was I supposed to live in pain? Depressed and frustrated, I felt like I was 100 years old and that someone had taken a baseball bat to me.

I don't want to sound like a baby. There is a happy ending to this misery. This is written so that if anybody with this type of pain reads it, they might be encouraged and know there is hope. Completely broken and desperate, I put my desires aside and cried out to God. I couldn't deal with the thought of endless pain with no hope for improvement. I didn't want to kill myself. I just wished for death, freedom from the constant, horrible pain. It seemed unfair to leave Brent by himself to finish raising the family. I was supposed to be his helper...not another person who needed his help.

One night I hobbled to my bed, flopped down, and cried myself to sleep. Sleep was needed, but it meant another morning would follow. Mornings were always the worst. Upon awakening, my whole body felt like it had frozen in place. It hurt to move anything. Despite the pain, I wiggled my toes, then my foot. Stretching systematically, it hurt as each part "broke free." Pain, a constant companion, did

reduce as the day progressed. But... the process relentlessly repeated itself. How humbling to realize that I only recognized the blessing of good health when it had vanished! I had gone through life thinking that good health was entitled to me.

Strength left me. At 42 years old, I was practically unable to get out of bed. A strategy needed to be implemented. I flopped my arm over my torso and pulled on the side of my mattress to turn my body from laying on my back to laying on my side. Then, I grabbed my nightstand and pushed upwards. Sometimes, my hands were needed to pull on my legs so that they were pointed toward the floor. My legs felt incredibly heavy, too heavy to move by themselves. Furniture and the wall were used for support as I made my way to the bathroom. In the toughest times, this “unfreezing” process took about an hour. I know because I watched the clock while stretching. This unwanted challenge greeted me each day.

I talked to my mom about my symptoms. She put her hands on me and prayed for my healing and to find the right doctors. I had a chiropractor and a primary physician. What other doctors could I need? Perhaps the Great Physician would be a good choice. My primary physician told me to take medications for the rest of my life to minimize symptoms. By then, I was taking several prescribed drugs and numerous supplements. My chiropractor encouraged me to research about stressors on the body and the impact of my diet. She wanted me to think of my body as a broken machine and try to discover what could repair it. Countless hours were spent learning via the internet.

How could I eat plenty of hamburgers and be anemic? Obviously, my body was not absorbing the nutrients it was given. Researching my every symptom and the effect of different foods and chemicals at the cellular level, God led me to a medical doctor on YouTube. He claimed that fibromyalgia symptoms could disappear with a diet change. There was no drug that could do that! Without prayer, I would have dismissed his claim as “too good to be true.” Now, he had my attention. He said that our bodies were not designed for the preservatives we

consume, for the sugar we love to eat, or for so much grain. Everything I love to eat can cause inflammation, which puts pressure on nerves and thus creates pain.

What if this man were right? What if eliminating sources of inflammation while eating great quantities of anti-inflammatory foods could heal me? Wrestling within my mind, a negative voice told me that it wasn't possible. It would require an immense amount of motivation and control. There was no proof.

God provided very nutritious plants and animals for us to eat. Mankind has transformed naturally helpful foods into unhealthy, highly processed, addictive substitutes. My selfish desires wanted the most intense delicious flavors. Was it worth a try to be healed simply through continual prayer and a completely natural diet? Yes!

At one time, my question had been, "How long must I live with this pain?" If there was some sort of time frame, at least a goal could be created. If prayer and a diet change could prevent or eliminate this pain within a year, was it worth the struggle? Yes! Research continued. Again, on YouTube, a video explained the life cycle of a cell within the body. To produce healthy new cells, it would probably take about 3 months. My cells were sick and needed the very best. Over time, my body had accumulated contaminates. God gave me the peace, faith, hope, patience, and self-control as I waited to be transformed and restored.

Fresh fruits and vegetables were my exclusive diet for about 3 weeks. After that, meat and cheese were gradually added. What is a salad without cheese? My personal grocery list consisted primarily of single ingredient foods, with a major emphasis on anti-inflammatory ones. I did not want to add more stress to my life by forcing myself to eat something that I disliked or that was expensive. If food was sold in a box, can, or plastic, every ingredient on the label was read. Food with preservatives, any sugar, corn syrup, or gluten never went on my plate! Taking no chances, all restaurants were avoided.

We had an abundant supply of blackberries and raspberries growing wild on a piece of our property. Hobbling about, as many were eaten straight from the plant as put into the freezer for later months. My husband helped me to identify wild edibles that grew in nature. Plantain, clover, nettle, and other “weeds” found in nature were now on my menu. They were free to harvest and had extremely rich nutrients.

Perhaps God knew I was too frugal to buy “healthy bacteria,” but that it would help me. When free diving, many packages of discarded probiotics were found. For no additional cost, it was added to my gut. Water was my only drink, the vast majority coming straight from a spring. With lab results showing a lack of trace minerals, I wanted to provide every building block possible for new cells to be healthy. Regular salt was replaced with pink Himalayan salt.

God gave me strength to resist temptation during this major lifestyle change. When others thought that my diet changes were too extreme and told me to indulge in “just a bite,” I politely declined. Hiding my condition as much as possible, they didn’t realize the seriousness of my situation. Faced with intense pain and a long list of things left to do before making my final exit, my earthly desires for ice cream, pizza, spaghetti, and bread were denied. Sometimes it really seemed like torture.

Doubt played games with my mind. There was no guarantee that these attempts would have a positive impact. Some pray for and receive an instant healing. That was not my expectation and did not happen. We prayed for an understanding of the problem and a solution. Accepting either a healing or death, either scenario was more appealing than enduring a life of constant pain. It didn’t seem like it would be God’s will.

Realizing my mobility limitations, I inquired about a potential online job to replace my regular teaching position. It was supplemental, not a full-time job. Working at home was not an option. I was not an invalid, but responsibilities needed to be reduced. My job as an after-school tutor was the first to go. I prayed to God for help through this time.

That summer, 27 doctors' appointments filled my calendar. I wondered about the logistics of maneuvering through a school building. Just the staff meeting held before the school year began was challenging because of the pain from sitting in a hard chair. How was I supposed to teach if I couldn't even sit in a chair? Serious doubts about my physical ability to manage a class of energetic first grade students haunted my mind.

The secretary expressed her observations that I was moving at turtle speed down the hall. Genuinely concerned, she didn't want me to become an addict. The Gabapentin prescribed was a controlled substance with a "street value." Her apprehension was understood. I was concerned too and hoped to eliminate the medicine as soon as possible. Praise God, addiction never became an issue!

Not trying to lose weight, 10 pounds for 3 months in a row melted away. It just happened. For those who had not seen me all summer, they were surprised at my condition when school was ready to start again in late August. With a hobble that couldn't be disguised and 30 pounds lighter, my own children teased me. Waddling like a penguin, especially if I'd been sitting for any length of time, I was happy just to move.

Guess what? I started to heal! It took about 3 months for me to notice improvement. Feeling especially good one day, right after Gabapentin had been increased again, I wanted to test my limitations. In my ambition, I decided to burn some trash in a burn barrel. A bag was added to the metal barrel. I waited in a lawn chair until it had burnt away and repeated. In this process, two embers

popped out of the barrel and landed on my left wrist. Looking at them confused me. My mind said that it should hurt. It did hurt, but not as much as my joints and muscles.

Even on a high dosage of Gabapentin, the pain running throughout my body was worse than two embers laying on my wrist. I decided to flick them off because it didn't seem like they should be there. Walking to a freezer to get an ice cube was an unappealing option. The pain of walking to the freezer would have been greater than the relief of the ice cube. A few minutes later, I was surprised by two blisters on my wrist. It was a sign that even though healing had begun, the road to recovery was far from over! To this day, the scar reminds me of this time in my life and of how God came to my rescue.

Still continuing with the very careful diet, in 5 months I felt great. It was time for a test. I ate two bites of stuffing and a small piece of pumpkin pie with whipped cream on Thanksgiving. There were no side effects were caused by the gluten, sugar, or preservatives. The next month, my medical doctor noticed my improved physical state and prescribed medications were reduced. God continued to give me self-control and peace as I followed the strict diet... allowing approximately one serving of gluten per month. After about 9 months of a drastic lifestyle change, ALL medications had been eliminated.

New lab reports showed that every category analyzed was within recommended specifications. Asking the doctor about the medicine she had told me I'd need for the rest of my life, she replied, "You don't have to take it. You're all better."

My mind heard, "You're healed!"

Thrilled to be pain free, my focus shifted to improving strength. There was a time when it was a struggle for me to carry three clean shirts or one pair of jeans from

the laundry area to my bedroom. Any more than that amount of weight was just too much. Improving, I found joy and thankfulness for being able to carry 7 shirts at one time. Once needing to put both of my feet on every step, grip the handrail with one hand and use the wall for additional support with the other hand, now I had improved stability and coordination. In time, I walked up and down steps with one foot per step and let go of the wall. Finally, the handrail was no longer needed. By the following year, I was able to help my family gather and carry small pieces of firewood on a hillside!

It would be nice to end this story here with healing and learning my lesson... but that would only be partially true. I slowly increased servings of gluten to once per week instead of once per month. At times, my tongue felt like needles poked it or it went numb. Occasionally, I lost feeling in the side of my mouth and accidentally bit it. It was very odd. My mouth was incredibly sensitive to gluten and preservatives. When this happened, I leaned on God to again give me more self-control and my symptoms disappeared.

You might think that by now I would have learned to stay away from food that causes me problems. Unfortunately, that fleshly side of me still tries to find the fine line of how much gluten and preservatives my body can handle before feeling the consequences. Ice cream, strawberry licorice, and “real” pizza still tempt me on a regular basis. Fortunately, now subtle signs of distress quickly cause me to change my habits to avoid greater unpleasanties.

Many times, illness is directly related to stress and diet. I had imposed all three types of worldly stressors on myself at once. Mental, physical, and chemical stressors from the world confronted me with negative energy. God has given all of us the answer to the stress problem. He has said many times not to fear. Don't worry. Trust Him. It's not His fault if we disobey and insist on carrying unnecessary burdens.

God is the ultimate power source emanating positive energy. His power can recharge and renew us from the negative forces in the world. We are our own barrier to His solution. Like a battery, we need a solid connection to fully recharge when we have been drained. Unfortunately, because of my stubborn, self-reliant pride and indifference to the living power source, I had seldom recharged with His positive presence. It took an extreme situation to get my attention, draw me closer to Him, keep me plugged in, and give me new life.

Mr. Hallberg

Summer break was nearly over, even though God's healing process wasn't finished. The beginning of a school year sets the atmosphere for the year ahead and is so important! Over 200 sick days had accumulated over the years. It was time to use some. Due to my health, I had to release control and trust a substitute. I prayed that God would somehow carry me through this difficult time.

How would I manage the demands of working multiple days in a row? Resigning was not an option. I purposefully scheduled a doctor's appointment during the already shortened first week just to have a chance to recuperate. My daddy didn't raise a quitter, but I was quite aware of my limitations! My struggles during the previous summer months had reminded me that God is awesome! I prayed for help for both myself and my unknown students.

God answered! He is so good and faithful! In the morning of the first day of classes, Mr. Hallberg just showed up at my classroom door. Recognizing him as an older gentleman who had substituted in the building during the prior school year but forgetting my prayer, I wondered why he had arrived at my door. Was there a mistake on the date of my sick leave form?

Mr. Hallberg explained that he was volunteering. He said he just felt like coming to school and thought that someone could use extra help. Upon his arrival at the school, he had learned that he would be my sub for the next day. He wondered if it was alright if he could observe my routine, set up, and get to know some of the students. Alright? It didn't take me long to figure out he was a very quick and direct answer to my prayers! He stayed all day.

What a Godsend! God not only heard my prayer, but He showed me favor beyond my expectations! My body just wasn't ready. I missed about 30 days of school that year. Mr. Hallberg was able to be there for all but a few of those days, providing consistency for both the students and me. On days that he subbed for other teachers, he worked with my students as his schedule allowed. More help arrived at my door that year than any other year, providing certain students with the individual and small group attention they needed.

Mr. Hallberg was more than a substitute for my class. News had spread amongst the staff that he was a former pastor. God knew my love for my job and students, but He also knew that I was preoccupied with my day-to-day life. God brought one of His servants to me. I thought my hardship was ending because my physical condition was improving. In hindsight, my challenges were about to change and intensify.

When asked, Mr. Hallberg, offered great wisdom. His insight came from God. A couple of years after working with Mr. Hallberg, I found out that he was in his 70's. How many people that age are capable and willing to lead a class of youngsters? His energy comes from a mighty power source. I am thankful for his help and example. He is a living sacrifice to God.

Mr. Hallberg doesn't teach so that kids know more facts or to earn a paycheck. Those are the side benefits. He genuinely cares about other people. In the process of caring, God's light shines. He must be around others so that when the Holy Spirit starts to move in someone's heart, he is ready to respond. He allows himself to be God's hands and feet, working on the front lines continually allowing the Holy Spirit to work through him. The school setting is the mission field. I thank God for putting him in my path.

The Bible tells us that the harvest is great, but the workers are few. You do not need to be an overseas missionary to spread the Good News! You don't have to

put Jesus into every sentence. When you show love for others, unexplainable peace, and joy abounding, others will see the light within you. In time, they too will reach for the light.

The First Shaking

Our family has always placed value on being self-sufficient. We hunted, grew our own food, and put an emphasis on learning primitive skills. We looked around the world and saw numerous potential threats to the modern way of life. We saw a growing population with fewer resources available. Our logical conclusion was and is that the typical lifestyle in America is not sustainable for future generations. It is mathematically impossible.

To help navigate the changes that we foresaw in the coming decades, we wanted to teach our children a diverse range of skills. We wanted them to be knowledgeable problem solvers in both modern and primitive settings. From the time our kids were young, we introduced them to these skillsets by raising animals, growing food, preserving food, building projects, and archery. Games such as chess taught them how to think multiple steps in advance for long term success. They learned self-defense strategies to protect themselves in a variety of different scenarios.

We felt and feel that knowledge is very valuable. Someone might be able to steal belongings, but it is much more difficult to steal your knowledge and leave you with an empty head. Unfortunately, we sought man's knowledge NOT God's wisdom. Our armor against the devil lay in the closet gathering dust.

If you want to win a game of baseball, you can't just read about it, watch it, and talk about it. You need to practice. Everyone knows that it would be silly to buy bats and gloves but to never walk out on the field and practice throwing, hitting, or working as a team before the big game. There is a learning curve to almost everything we do. Well, we did not want to start learning how to survive amid a calamity. In our research, it seemed as if the biggest threat during times of chaos is mankind. Unprepared ruthlessly overtake resources of the peacefully prepared.

Brent had his conceal carry license for years. Because of changing laws, he felt a desire to be more open about Constitutional rights. He opted to be more visible and to carry openly, which was and is legal in the state of Ohio. Brent's view was that a right not exercised is a right lost. Being legal and being culturally accepted are two separate things. Although open carry is legal, public opinion varies greatly depending upon your location within the state. Being from a very rural area, Brent was accustomed to generally supportive people. Shane, Brent's brother, had a prophetic word. He told Brent that open carry may be legal, but if you do it, eventually you will find yourself in jail because people who don't understand are uncomfortable. At the time, his words seemed a bit extreme.

On a day in mid-September, Brent went to a big outdoor auction with the girls. Isaiah and I were at work and Roman was in college. Brent knew there would be potential bargains and lots of produce being thrown away. In the afternoon or early evening vendors fill dumpsters with unsold produce that will be rotten by the following week. Not finding any bargains that day, but plenty of produce for our animals, Brent had boxes of produce stacked on our hitch cargo carrier. Rabbits, chickens, goats, and pigs are not as particular about their food as people.

On his way home, Brent stopped along a rural part of a road to admire a piece of property. At that time in our lives, we were searching for a nice, quiet place. While parked along the shoulder of a back road discussing the beauty of a particular piece of property, a woman pulled her vehicle in front of our vehicle and prevented Brent from moving forward. With the path ahead blocked, Brent looked to back away from the woman who was yelling aggressively as she approached our vehicle about dumping on her property. Unfortunately, cars were now behind our vehicle because they could not pass the woman who had parked in the middle of the road either. When she approached and was close enough to see in the window, she yelled to her friend, "He has a gun!" The two women quickly jumped in their car and left.

Apparently, she must have had past problems with someone dumping vegetables. How were we to know? On Brent's way home police cars kept showing up until there were about six cars behind him. They all turned on their lights and Brent pulled over to see what was wrong. Approximately ten officers pointed their loaded guns at my husband and three children. Brent was charged with aggressive menacing and taken to jail. The girls were taken to the police station until I could arrive to pick them up. What's aggressive menacing? It sounds scary.

While in jail, Brent heard other inmates talking about aggressive menacing. Federal law has not changed, but the way state laws read have changed. If anyone FEELS threatened, even if you are not physically or verbally threatening someone, you can be charged with menacing. If you in possession of anything that the police believe can be used as a weapon, you can be charged with aggressive menacing. This allows the public and localities a broad range of power. It is a way to make things very uncomfortable for people who choose to exercise constitutional rights.

Brent was held at the jail in what he described as a metal fencing area typically used for dog cages. There was a drain in the middle of the floor where people could urinate. A toilet and shower for both men and women were available for all to see. Brent said a topless drunk woman was in the office flirting. Apparently, she had special rules and didn't have to stay in the holding cell. Then again, to use the toilet she or anyone else would need to remove more clothing. Brent was disgusted. Since there was no court on Wednesdays and he was arrested on a Tuesday, Brent was booked. A big man who said that he was just being rough but had been charged with rape begged for Brent to be his cellmate. Brent asked if he could go somewhere quiet. He said that he was put in an isolation cell next to the other man who yelled all night and punched the window of his cell so hard that he splintered the plexiglass.

In Brent's cell, the button to press for water was broken causing the water to run down the wall that already had numerous unidentified bodily excrements on it.

Brent said he didn't eat, drink, or use the restroom while in either location. It was only when he was about to be released and the jail had a sudden lockdown did he use a private restroom in the release area. It was almost 96 hours later. Some of Brent's personal belongings were not returned to him. His stainless-steel zippo lighter that Isaiah gave him, Kershaw knife, wooden sycamore spoon, and one credit card were missing. If you want to leave a jail, you must sign a paper saying that you have your belongings. Brent signed just to be able to leave. I quickly cancelled Brent's missing credit card.

When Brent saw us, he burst into tears and said, "I'm sorry." He wasn't sorry for doing anything wrong. He was sorry for inconveniencing us and for our sadness. His third word was "water." We got him a drink. He told us the conditions inside.

Two guards were standing outside in the parking lot. Brent indicated that one of them was the warden. I walked over to him and said what I had just been told was "not right." I told him that I have a voice and that I would speak. Yet, it is only after writing about over 80 different topics and several years later that I have the courage to keep that promise and raise my voice about it. It is a perfect example of how we sometimes bury our painful experiences, allowing the same experiences to repeat.

Brent said that during his 96 hours, he planned ways to be able to end his experience. He said he would die if he went back. The thought of losing him was too much to bear. If there was even a 1 % chance that he would die, I did not want to take that risk again. Instead of relying on God's protection, we took the incident as a sign that it was time to take a big step and retreat from society. Instead of going to his next court appearance, Brent went into the woods planning never to leave... EVER. The world was too painful. For two and a half years, Brent's plan was reality.

Please learn from our mistakes. The devil roams seeking to destroy. He is clever and knows your personal weakness. There is no amount of prepping you can do to keep you safe. We tried to prepare for societal collapse. We never prepared for our own government to view us as a threat or criminal. It never crossed our minds. As culture changes, we need to prepare for this possibility. There is no safe place on earth. JESUS is the only answer... the only One to bring peace and comfort in times of despair.

I'm not Telling

When working at school one day, the secretary received a phone number for me to call someone regarding my mom. Nobody had ever contacted me at school about my mother, so I called ASAP. The mysterious caller said that my mom had been admitted to our local hospital and intended to keep it a secret from my sister and me. Mom didn't want to worry us. As soon as I finished with my work, I went straight towards my mom.

I arrived at the hospital and found my mom's room. With the door open wide, my mom's voice wafted into the hall as she casually talked to another lady. Trying not interrupt my mom's visit with this other woman, I quietly waited outside her room. I was standing there for about thirty seconds to a minute when I heard my mom very clearly exclaim, "and I am not telling Ty and April." (April is my sister.)

That was it. I couldn't wait any more. I walked in the room and asked, "What are you not telling Ty and April?"

Surprised by my presence, she didn't answer me! Instead, she attempted to redirect me by asking me how long I had been standing by the door and how much I had overheard. I said that I had been standing by the door just long enough to hear her say, "I'm not telling Ty and April." I wanted to know the big secret.

My mom's sugar level was 585 when she was admitted to the hospital. Then, in response to treatment, her sugar level had dropped dangerously low. 90-120 is the normal range. Below 70 is considered dangerous and if you are above 300, you should seek medical help. At 600, diabetic coma becomes a reality. When I arrived, her sugar level had stabilized in the 300 range.

I later told a friend who works as an EMT about my mom's sugar level. She said that 585 was the highest sugar reading she had ever heard of without the person going into a coma. My mom's friend, who is a retired nurse, had stopped at my mom's house to pick her up for church services. She noticed my mom's state of confusion. Another lady at church was struggling with high blood pressure that evening. Friends urged the other lady to go to the hospital to have it checked out. Since the lady with high blood pressure was headed to the emergency room, friends also convinced my mom to go too as a precautionary measure. At the hospital, the one with high blood pressure was treated and released. My mom was admitted.

God fit all the pieces together to get my mom necessary medical care and for me to overhear at exactly the right moment. Why? We hear of unfortunate incidents where someone was at the wrong place at the wrong time. This was the exact opposite. There must be a purpose, a reason for everything to "fall into place" that evening. God's protection was evident.

Dairy Queen

As a young child, my mom taught me the joy of garage sales. When just 5 or 6 years old, I used to count out nickels and dimes to buy clothes for my doll and stuffed animals. Finding treasures at yard sales continues to be a blessing and adventure in my life.

One sunny summer day, my mom and I went to yard sales in a neighboring town. It had been a good day, finding lots of bargains, but a hot one. The sun and the activity had worn on us. It was time for sales to be closing and we were ready for some ice cream! Reflecting about the day and talking about general family matters, my mom asked about Roman's new girlfriend.

Not wanting to be judgmental or to worry my mom about Roman's "significant other," I spoke carefully. Roman's girlfriend was polite to me and there didn't appear to be conflicts, but under the surface I sensed danger. Something bothered me. The only book she brought for her daughter to read while visiting me was a book about witches and potions. I did not agree with her reading selection but was thankful for the insight as to what she wanted her child to learn! Knowing how persuasive feelings of love can be, I wanted to proceed with caution. If forced to take sides, my son could choose to distance me and become more entangled with this individual.

My mom asked about her again. Answering briefly, my mom commented that I wasn't saying anything bad, but not good either. I told her that there may be more to this girlfriend than what Roman could see. My mom asked if I wanted to pray about it. Absolutely! Right there in the Dairy Queen, we asked for Roman to be able to have clarity and to see this woman for her true colors... whatever they might be.

The next weekend, Roman came to visit us. He informed our family that he had seen a side of this woman that could not be tolerated. Curious, I asked Roman when this determination had been made. It was a couple of hours after we had prayed. I then revealed to Roman that we had prayed for him to see her true personality. He had to see it for himself.

For the first time in his life, Roman thanked me for praying for him. He was so grateful that he made a special trip to my mom's house to thank her in person. For all of you moms, dads, grandparents, and prayer warriors out there praying... don't stop! It makes a difference!

The enemy is very persistent and very clever. He has had plenty of years to study human behavior and knows how to attack our weakest area. Our armor is vital for our own protection, as well as for our vulnerable loved ones! Intercessory prayer is an offensive weapon against enemy plans, even when it goes unrecognized by the recipients. Have faith and don't doubt that your prayer is being heard. The devil wants you to question the effectiveness of prayer so that you will stop praying and your loved ones will be easier to devour! Jesus reminds us to have patience.

God wants none to perish. When you pray for the salvation of others, you are praying in alliance with God's Word. It may not be when you want, but He Himself wants your loved ones to be saved!

Headlights in the Night

I have a great respect for nature and wonder at its beauty. My family and I have been compelled for some time to reduce our carbon footprint. As much as possible, we have sought knowledge to improve our environmentally friendly lifestyle while sharing skills we have learned with others. This general mindset leads me to the setting for this story.

Nestled in gently rolling mountains of Kentucky, there was at a gathering of individuals from many different walks of life. We had two commonalities, a love for the earth and a desire for a more natural existence within our modern world. I had enjoyed a mentally rejuvenating day. Physically, I was exhausted. I shared the responsibility of providing fun and educational activities for youth at the event. I felt as though the day had been worthwhile and productive. Now, rest was needed for the busy day awaiting me in the morning. There was just one problem. My mind was racing!

I laid awake on my cot in the tent for a long time. The night was cool, completely dark, and quiet. Then the inevitable happened. You guessed it. I had to go to the bathroom! Not wanting to leave my nice warm blankets to go out, in the middle of the night, I assured myself that it could wait until morning. You can guess again as to how well that worked. You might think, "Get up and go. Then you won't have to worry about it." That would have been the logical thing to do, but that would have been too easy. There were temporary facilities about 25 feet away, but fearful of a snake or spider going unnoticed with my dim headlamp, I didn't want to risk it. Modern restrooms were about 100 yards away. Again, I decided to just wait.

A big reason that sleep eluded me was that I knew Roman would be arriving sometime during the night. He was a primitive skills instructor at a camp in North Carolina. As soon as his workday finished, he would travel to join the group so that he could share his expertise. Because of nominal cell service, the variation in possible travel time, and the difficulty of finding the remote location in the dark, I

had no idea of when Roman would arrive. He frequently drives slower than most travelers and has actually been pulled over by a police officer for driving 55 mph in a 70-mph speed limit area. When questioned about why he was impeding traffic, Roman simply stated the truth. He was trying to get the best gas mileage possible.

I was concerned for Roman's safety. He was driving a great distance after working all day and I had seen his ex-girlfriend earlier in the day. I wanted to protect him from any evil that might still be lurking. Tossing and turning for a long time, this potential threat also kept me awake.

I finally gave up on the idea of sleeping and walked the approximate 100 yards to the restroom. Surprising myself, I walked even further, past the restroom and towards several cars parked at the entrance of the event. Roman had said that afternoon that he planned to park there and sleep in his car until morning. Concerned that his ex-girlfriend might look for his car and try to persuade him to get back together, I went to check the models of the parked vehicles. None of them looked familiar. I started to turn around and head back toward the restroom when through the trees, headlights appeared in the distance. I paused and waited. What are the chances the lights would be from Roman's car? The lights grew brighter. It was Roman! I just happened to be standing in the middle of the road as he arrived at his destination.

Voicing my concerns about parking at the entrance, I asked if he would park beside my tent. The staff knew Roman and were already aware that he would be arriving during the night. He could officially check in when the registration table opened in the morning. I quickly explained how to find the tent and said that I'd be there in a few minutes. He agreed and went to park his car.

Getting back to the campsite about 5 minutes later, Roman's ex-girlfriend had already found him. My concerns were validated! In Dairy Queen, intercession

had been strictly spiritual. This time, my physical presence fought in alliance with my prayers. Making myself an awkward third wheel, I stood with them until Roman was almost done preparing for sleep. Then I excused myself to the tent about three feet away. Comforted by God's perfect timing and obvious love for my son, I fell asleep almost instantly!

Just Give Me the Ones Who Need Love

My summer break was almost gone, and I still did not have a different job. I had a lack of motivation. I really didn't want a different job. I liked my job. I just didn't feel as if I would ever teach at the new building that was currently under construction. The current buildings were supposed to be in use for one more year. After that, they would be torn down or given to local communities if they were wanted by the elected officials.

I remember one day praying to God that He just "give me the ones who need love." What I meant by that was that I was willing to focus more on the emotional needs of my students than on pure academic achievement. Just a clue... don't ever say that to God unless you really mean it.

The first day of school came and I met my students. The previous year's teachers all stared and shook their heads as my class walked by. I heard, "Wow! You got all of them." "That's not fair." "You should complain." and "We did not do this. We divided them, but you have all of them."

What could I do? I knew it wasn't the principal's fault. I, after all, had been the one to submit myself to the extra work that I knew would ensue by giving permission to God to "give me the ones who need love." I felt great, fully energized, and ready to tackle such a challenge.

Unfortunately, my energy burst was superficial... from man... and very quickly drained. I was drawing closer to God through prayer, but I was only using one piece of God's armor. I still needed to drag the rest out of the closet. After the second day, I was talking to God about the problem with a slightly different attitude. I simply explained to Him that I was not going to do my students any good if I were absent and missing a bunch of school because I couldn't move. The stress was causing my entire body to ache, and I was beginning to waddle like

a penguin again. I told God that if I were to be effective, I was going to require some help. Something needed to be done to meet the diverse needs of my class and to relieve my stress from such a workload. Was the district going to hire an aide just for me? Probably not.

God got to work and answered my prayer. No, the district didn't hire another aide. The head teacher came to my classroom door and asked if I was interested in hosting someone from a local college. I had one question. "Is the person allowed to help?" You guessed it. Yes, she was able to help!

In her training to become a teacher's aide, this young lady was able to work on various tasks within the classroom, including redirecting students' attention! She had no Driver's License and was completely deaf without her two hearing aids. Living with her aunt, she had to walk several miles on curvy, country roads in her professional attire because no transportation was available for her in the afternoons. She helped me in the classroom, and I was able to safely deliver her back to her home.

After about a week of classes, I thought that God must have made a mistake. There was a little boy on my class roster who had never made it to class. I figured that he must have moved. Maybe God didn't account for that. Then again, I have been wrong before and God doesn't make mistakes. I saw in the payday news that a homebound tutor was needed. What are the chances that the tutor was for the missing student still on my class roster?

In my heart, I really didn't want to tutor. I had reduced my responsibilities by eliminating tutoring. My class was the "most energetic" of any class I had worked with in 20 years. I was exhausted. In addition to the regular academic activities, I was even doing the "extra" motivational activities with them like making ice cream from scratch, having a garden harvest tasting, and making homemade applesauce. I was determined for these kids to like school, even if it took

everything I had. Remembering my prayer, I submitted a letter of interest stating that I was interested in homebound tutoring, but only if it were for the student on my class roster. You guessed it. It was the same little boy.

I was told that I could start homebound tutoring after the school day had ended. The student has very brittle bones. Along with medical challenges, this smart young man had an intense aversion to traditional academics...even when disguised in games! He did everything possible to ignore me! My patience was tested. He didn't think he would ever need to read. He planned on staying at home with his mom for the rest of his life. What an interesting time! In the end, I really appreciate the time I was able to spend with both him and his family.

God listened and granted my request. Be careful what you say to God. God has a much wider perspective. I imagined about 25 students. This was just one group that needed love. Soon, my eyes would be opened.

