

Adventuring with God

with Jeanne Hedrick

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Our Shelter From the Stormy Blast

"I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."

Psalm 4:8

When I was praying about what to share in this month's devotional I suddenly remembered a vivid dream that I had a few years ago, just after the 9/11 attack on the twin towers in New York. As I recall, I assumed at the time that the dream was prompted by watching all the news coverage of the dramatic event. Like so many of my fellow Americans, I felt vulnerable and anxious. All of us wondered when and where we would be hit again by our enemies.

Here's how the dream went: I was alone in my car driving home. I was being followed by some younger men that were obviously very angry about something. I wasn't sure if I had caused their anger by inadvertently cutting them off, or if they were just looking for someone to bully and intimidate. As they followed me closely, driving in a reckless manner and gesturing for me to pull over, I remember how terrified I felt. It seemed to take forever but finally I saw my driveway ahead. Without signaling I pulled in, drove into the detached garage, and waited to see if they would come after me. I finally relaxed when I saw their car drive on down the road, but I couldn't shake the frightening encounter. It was especially troubling because I had no idea what had prompted it. The incident lingered in my mind and made me apprehensive and wary for several days following. I went about my daily life, but I never felt safe. Later on, in my dream, I returned home to see that my house was on fire. The firemen said it was probably arson, and I immediately knew who was responsible. I was so relieved to wake up from this upsetting dream!

Unlike many dreams I have had, this one did not fade from my memory. I could recall the details with clarity days later and I knew it held some kind of message for me. I pondered it over and over and prayed about its meaning. Finally, it came to me.

When the Lord speaks to me in my spirit I usually can't repeat what He said word for word, but here is the essence of what He said: "Do you see what craziness you live around every day of your life? The terrorist attack on the country is not the first or the last threat you will face. Every day some of your own countrymen pose far more risk to you than foreign terrorists. Don't be afraid or dismayed. I am your protector and shield. I am able to keep you safe in the midst of great danger. So be at peace. Trust me."

That message of comfort totally changed my perspective, and its truth continues to give me peace even now as I begin a new year. In the kind of world we live in, how can we hope to keep ourselves safe? The recovery last week of two boys kidnapped by a pedophile in Missouri has rekindled discussions about how vigilant parents need to be in our society today. Somehow parents must strike the delicate balance between not panicking and being too restrictive with their children's activities and yet not being so careless that they invite a pedophile's attention. Even grown women can't afford to be too trusting in how they conduct their lives. This week a seventy-five-year-old woman was attacked and savagely beaten in an attempt to take her purse. She was not in a dangerous neighborhood, emerging from a bar at two in the morning. She was returning to her car around three in the afternoon in a gasoline station parking lot. Not everyone "out there" is wicked and evil, of course, but it's getting harder and harder to distinguish the good guys from the bad ones.

Here in North Carolina we have recently been reminded of the depth of depravity in some minds, and the most telling thing about the incident is that there was not that much shock on the part of the public when they found out about it. A local father

didn't just kill his four-year-old daughter. He decapitated her and left her to be found by her mother. Can you imagine how his neighbors felt when they found out? How do you process that kind of information – that a cruel and malicious monster lives on your block?

There's no doubt that we live in a scary time, but I suppose it has always been dangerous to some extent or another. Mankind's sinful nature always threatens to break out in some violent way, and there is little we can do to predict it or prevent it from happening. Being at "the wrong place at the wrong time" is how the world describes such occurrences. But think about King David. For years he was hunted down by someone intent on murdering him, and this murderous person (King Saul) had a whole army of men to help him! David could not have been in worse circumstances. Yet he testified that he could lie down and sleep in peace. Why? Because he was convinced that God himself was watching over him.

David expounds on this theme over and over again throughout the book of Psalms. God protects. God provides. God sees. God cares. "He that dwells in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty," he confidently proclaims. "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Psalm 91:1-2). I want to conclude with a wonderful thought by Louise Haskins that I found in a book of quotations. It's the best possible advice for us all as we begin 2007.

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown. And he replied: Go out into the darkness, and put thine hand into the hand of God. That shall be to thee better than light and safer than a known way."

*"O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home!
Under the shadow of Thy throne Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone, and our defense is sure.
Before the hills in order stood, or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God, to endless years the same.
O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while life shall last, and our eternal home."*

(text by Isaac Watts, based on Psalm 90)