

Adventuring with God

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June / July 2007

Jesus, What a Strength in Weakness!

Have you ever faced some situation with an out-of-proportion fear and dread? You may say to yourself, "It's not as bad as all that" and give yourself a pep talk, but your heart still shrinks away from even the remote *possibility* of coming face to face with it. You do everything you can to avoid the scenario and maybe years go by without the fear ever becoming reality. But sometimes, no matter how carefully we orchestrate our lives, we find ourselves in the midst of our worst case scenario, staring into the eyes of our "enemy," and we have no choice but to soldier on.

I remember with almost perfect clarity one such encounter. Through unusual circumstances I found myself driving my mother to catch a plane in Syracuse, New York the first week of January. The trip from Kanata, Ontario to the border was uneventful, even though it was snowing lightly and the windshield wiper on the driver's side wasn't working very well. The border guard warned us that the driving conditions in New York were deteriorating quickly but I chose to turn a deaf ear to his warning, in spite of my intense fear of driving a car in a snowstorm (something I had carefully avoided for decades because of my husband's willingness to take the wheel in such circumstances). Oh boy, did I ever regret that decision!

We were only a few miles over the border when we saw how dangerous the storm had become. Cars could be seen in the ditches on both sides of the roadway. My hands ached as I gripped the wheel with too much force. I gritted my teeth as I tried to see out of the window that was not being properly cleared by the wiper. Soon we were in white-out conditions (Wasn't this what I had always feared would happen if I tried to drive in a snowstorm?) and the only reason we could stay on the road was because God graciously put a semi truck right in front of us. I could just see the top of his smokestack poking through the swirl of white and I followed it. .for mile after grueling mile. All the time we were driving I kept pondering the obvious

question in my mind: How would I be able to see the turn off for the airport even if we made it that far?

Of course we prayed as we crept along the treacherous highway. But my levels of tension and fear were so elevated that the prayer afforded me no comfort at all. I was trying to be brave, but all I really wanted to do was scream and throw my hands up in frustration. Just a few miles before we reached the airport connecting road, I was amazed to see the snow suddenly let up and the skies clear above us. And I could actually read the signs for the airport! We would make the flight after all!

This was not the end of the story, though. After safely getting my mom on her way, I returned to my car and found that it wouldn't start. It was forty below zero with the wind chill, and the wind was truly howling across that open parking lot. How would I get home? Here I faced another enemy I had always feared: being vulnerable, at the mercy of strangers, in scary and unpredictable circumstances. Trudging back to the terminal with a heavy heart, I prayed again with no more faith than before. My spirits lifted when – about an hour later - someone finally got the car going, but I drove right back into that same snowstorm with white-out conditions! I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the flares up ahead and the highway patrolmen waving us off the highway. The road back to Ontario was being closed. .considered impassible. I would have to go off into a town I had never been in before and find a place to stay. I'm sure some would consider it a great adventure, a lark, to be stuck in a new town in the middle of a blizzard. But for me, it was simply awful.

All the motels and hotels I passed blinked "no vacancy" – not a good sign. But someone where I stopped to phone home suggested I try a bed and breakfast place a few blocks over. I wondered as I slid along the slippery street, crying from sheer exhaustion and terror, if I would have to spend the night in the

car or in a booth at McDonalds. I prayed for another miracle, and God came to my rescue. The B & B was owned by a Christian couple who welcomed me in. As I drove back home the next morning, I realized something that had escaped me the day before. I had faced my worst enemies and I had survived. I didn't "enjoy" the experience, but I had been provided a safe journey through the gracious provisions of God. He had proved himself to me in a brand new way, and I would never forget it.

God sees what we do not: that without such faith-stretching experiences we would have no way of learning just how amazing He is. We read all the verses that promise His help in times of need, but they can offer little instruction until we are in a place where we are so weak that we can rely on *nothing else* but His surpassing strength. It's only then that we can really find out "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Sometimes these staring-down-the-enemy experiences are not so short lived. Sometimes they drag on and on, for weeks, months, maybe even years. How much harder it is to cling to God when it seems like He is ignoring our pleas for deliverance.

Does He hear? Does He care? Such thoughts resonate through

our hearts as we struggle through the seemingly impossible obstacles. But just when we think we have reached the end of the road and we will be defeated by some enemy, He brings a small measure of hope or relief and it is enough to remind us that He *does* see us and He *does* care about what we are going through.

I have been going through such a challenging time recently. One night I felt so low and so alone; I was spent emotionally, seemingly unable to soldier on. Through my tears I began to read the devotional by my bed. The reading was entitled "Out of the Wreck I Rise" and began with the verse "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:35). "Shall tribulation? Shall anguish? Shall famine?" Oh how I needed to be reminded of that important fact! It was enough to encourage me to believe that I would face down this enemy, not because of my resources but because of my faithful Father who loves me. We all have our own private struggles and fears that no one else can fully understand or identify with. But no matter. Our Father knows, and He has pledged to be all we need to soldier through and get to the other side safely. And when we get there, we will know Him in a kind of intimacy that cannot be known any other way.

*Jesus, what a Strength in weakness! Let me hide myself in Him;
Tempted, tried, and sometimes failing, He, my Strength, my victory wins.
Jesus, what a Help in sorrow! While the billows o'er me roll,
Even when my heart is breaking, He, my comfort, helps my soul.
Jesus, what a Guide and Keeper! While the tempest still is high,
Storms about me, night o'ertakes me, He, my Pilot, hears my cry.
Jesus, I do now receive Him, More than all in Him I find,
He hath granted me forgiveness, I am His, and He is mine.*

(J. Wilbur Chapman, 1859-1918)