

WE WERE LOST, BUT NOW WE ARE FOUND

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Our Lord God tells us in Ezekiel 34:11-17 that he Himself will come to search for those who know His voice. No matter how lost we may think we are, God loves us still. We are His sheep even though we may lose our way; we will always remain in His flock. It is how well we accept our mistakes and follow His divine guidance that gladdens the heart of Him who searches the mountains and valleys for those sheep who He knows are His own.

We must learn to walk in His ways, not that of our own. Reach out your hand, seek His strength for you are in His heart.

It still seems like yesterday, that day upon the mountainside, when terror struck our family. Sitting here now, I still feel that same gladness in my heart that God heard our cries when we were in such great need. However, fear had us in its grip that day on a treacherous cliff. I can still see the desperate need for assurance on my wife, Margaret's, face, huddled with our two children, Brenda and Theresa, about twenty feet away from me. We were forced to that place by an event that had struck us and caused us to flee into entrapment.

Hundreds of feet below us lay certain death. We turned to Christ in faith knowing that we would be guided away from this dangerous place to safety.

When I think back, I now realize that it was our walk with Christ that had enabled us to live through this point in our lives. Through the love of the many loving Christians in our Church we found a new life, a life of learning and loving in a new and deeper commitment to Christ.

I am so thankful for those people who made the love of Christ so evident that it brought us to our knees in faith when we were in need. We were given complete faith that we were His sheep and He would indeed find us and comfort us unto safety.

Margaret who had stood by me in faith for fifteen years, had been able to see the change in me some five years earlier, until finally I had given myself and my family and our possessions to God. From teachings and witnesses that were freely given from my priests, Forrest Mobley and Sandy Greene, and countless laymen through our daily teachings and Bible Studies, I was able to follow the leading and accept a calling to eldership into that part of the Body of Christ known as Immanuel Anglican, Destin, Florida.

Some weeks earlier we accepted an invitation to spend some time at a friend's cabin located in the mountains of South Carolina near Easley, where we would pick up directions and any necessary instructions for arriving and staying at the mountain retreat.

Friday, October, 1975, our family made a mad dash from school, work and various other activities to our neglected van equipped for camping and togetherness family outings. Not so long ago we spent almost as much time camping, fishing or just outdoors as it seemed we did indoors. We were well-starved for this particular trip, for it had been at least a year since our last camping venture.

As a family we have always been very close, but now with the Lord's leading we had grown even

closer. Happiness was abounding in the blue and white van with our "yellow banana" canoe perched high upon its white "turtle top."

We spent our first night near Opelika, Alabama, but left a daybreak in order to arrive at "Six Flags Over Georgia" and spend the day in fun. It was as if God would fill us with fun and excitement before our mountain retreat of supposedly quietness with each other and God. The following night we stayed in Tugaloo Park where the girls found a very high and grassy earthen bank which produced a ride not entirely unlike the Six Flags Log Flume, but without a watery spray.

The beauty of creation has always heightened my awareness of God, but on this trip it was even more evident as we smelled the air and cast rocks; skidding them across the lake. Washing dishes even became a treat in the fresh clear lakes, where the minnows who came to eat the tiny little tidbits of eggs and breakfast food watched in earnest as they darted in and out catching tidbits as they floated about.

I cannot begin to share all of the wonderful feelings that we were filled with along our way. We rejoiced in the times we spent beside the lakes and under the spreading trees that dropped their gold colored leaves upon our family worship services, as if to say, I too worship God with you. It is so good to receive God's blessings and direction. It seemed that there wasn't a time during this trip that we did not feel the presence of God. This was our first trip as a family where we totally prayed and then followed the direction of the Holy Spirit. Not one turn did we take without actually feeling His direction. We found ourselves traveling back roads and entering areas we would not have dreamed of going before. There were so many marked with only names and every turn looked like it might be wrong.

It was such a blessing to stop and ask our Father in prayer, then drive off in the right direction in faith that we had been given the right way. Although I must confess I began to be concerned as I watched the gasoline gauge and sun sink lower and lower.

Not knowing where you are at all and with darkness coming on, you can become lost. Nevertheless, we had been given the guidance we needed and thereby arrived safely just at dusk, high atop a 3000 foot mountain overlooking Whiteside Mountain near Cashiers. The cabin, a rustic wooden structure with green siding placed over its wormy chestnut warmth, chased the chill out of the mountain night.

Across the front of the cabin, over looking Whiteside Mountain a large screened in porch stretched invitingly with four hand-made rocking chairs that just fit city folks looking for a change to do some "rock'n and talk'n."

Inside was a large stone fireplace and a long community style dining table making this large room the "in" place to be. It soon became evident that our nights would be spent sprawled before a roaring fireplace with a good book or family conversation all the while listening to the radio. It seemed as though we had gone back in time to when things to do meant family togetherness. The ground around the cabin could be described in one word, down. Virtually all directions of this 100 acre paradise were racing evermore toward the golden covered valleys or coves below. There are only four or five cabins located on the entire mountain so walking and dodging cars or kids on skateboards was not necessary. The placid serenity of these woods that abounded with

natural sounds and color was so much that you wanted to stretch your arms out and caress God, for you felt that you were in His reach at all times.

I am describing this place fully in order that you might feel in your heart the exhilaration that we had upon arrival and in embarking on our infamous first hike in the "real" mountains. You might think from all of the previous descriptions that we were seasoned campers, able to handle ourselves in any situation, well, forget it! Our camping trips and outdoors had always been "flatlander" camping and the mountaintop terrain was something that we knew nothing about. The nearest mountain to Destin is a whopping 200 feet in elevation, a sand dune called "Blue Mountain," a far cry from the rocky forest covered terrain we were now atop of.

Man always has such an inability to function as he should when free, and we were certainly going to prove this true. We ate a hearty breakfast and thanked the Lord for all the beauty and many blessings we had received and left, burning our own trail in all the eagerness of the moment, not asking for His guidance or even considering it. How frequently do we feel that way when we are in a safe place, we can take care of ourselves! Right?

It seems that we were about to learn a good lesson, but for the moment all that could be heard was joy and the calling of a waterfall that sounded nearby. The mountains that we had previously known were with improved trails, rest chairs and water fountains. Everything here was so great and wonderful to see, touch and to hear. The leaves were in such glorious splendor and we had never witnessed this beauty before. It was all growing and aglow in a flaming brilliance. We yearned to be a party of all we could. Suddenly that year of no recreation had vanished and we were free again. Standing up on tree stumps and fallen moss covered trees, we were able to catch fleeting glimpses of "our" waterfall. Maybe no one had ever seen it before; it was so beautiful that we had to reach it, with camera in hand to claim it for posterity.

The ground began falling off rapidly, but due to our inexperience with the ruggedness of the mountains, we continued on, although much slower. It soon became apparent that even with fearless leading, there was a beginning concern, even in myself. The mountain at this point was dropping off at more than a very wet and slippery 60 degrees. I could see the waterfall in the distance, but even I knew that without ropes and less sense than I had we could never make it. It was at this point that I suddenly became aware of our treacherous pathway and concern spread over me as I cautioned everyone to firmly grasp every sapling and "hand hold" securely for there appeared to be no bottom below us.

Brenda, 11 years old had been last and now became first making her way back the way we had descended. It took only a short while before we had gotten back to a dryer area in our climb up to safety.

The following events happened swiftly, with a few minutes. Suddenly I heard Brenda scream in panic.

I immediately told Margaret and Theresa, 13 years old, to sit down and then I ran (as much as possible) to Brenda.

What I saw to this day brings a hurt to my heart.

She was standing in one spot, in a panic that caused her to revert to her infancy, as if standing in

ant beds and not knowing what to do but scream. She was covered with hundreds of swarming yellow jackets.

I yelled at her to run to me as I was running to her.

She ran toward me, tripped and fell just as I reached her.

I scooped her up before she reached the ground and brushed the yellow jackets away from her, then covered her the best that I could.

As I comforted Brenda, still covering her, I looked up to see what seemed as thousands of insect swarming up from a hole that we must have disturbed when we had passed the first time. I had read and talked to people about the horrors of the vicious attacks of yellow jackets. The remembrance sent chills, in thoughts of panic striking Margaret and the girls. My thoughts led me to see that in their attempts to run away, they might instead have fallen down the mountain to what would be instant injury and possible death.

I took Brenda by the hand firmly and shouted to my family, that had become more important to me now than ever in my life because I realized that we were so close to tragedy that I could even feel its hot breath. The only thing I could see for us to do was to quickly move laterally across the mountainside.

While consoling Brenda who was still in severe pain and nearing shock, I began to my wonderment reassuring them that Jesus was with us in our time of need, shouting to be sure that I would be heard and praying at all times that I wasn't wrong.

Suddenly after moving only what seemed like fifty or sixty feet across the mountain, we were faced with what almost drove me to panic myself. We stared at a completely rock-faced area even steeper than before. We stopped, and fear gripped into the pit of my stomach. I knew the yellow jackets were right on our heels and could not go back the way we came. It was then that I truly felt the weight of the situation. A compassion spread over me for my family that I had never felt before.

As I am writing this now, I know that throughout this whole ordeal I knew and felt the guidance of the Holy Spirit, especially when it became apparent that we were in great need. This of course is fully realized while sitting here in my soft easy chair in the security of my home. At the time my thoughts were that of a lost and frightened Christian asking for help from his Father whom we had not followed as we should have and now we were lost and in big-time trouble. I told them to sit very still and low to the ground because the yellow jackets were not far away. At that point we realized there were three or four of them still in Brenda's hair.

Quickly we brushed the ornery insects away from her. They now seemed dazed and confused as if drugged.

She was so afraid, like a desperate little puppy who was beaten into submission. I heard her saying over and over, "Daddy, it hurts so bad,," and looking back saying, "They are going to get us again!"

I could see the same look growing in Theresa's eyes as we huddled, gripping small saplings that somehow had managed to grow.

We prayed for Brenda, that the fear and pain would leave her, knowing that only a miracle of God would do.

I wanted to stop and pray for them all and myself, but my fear of the insects attacking us all, knowing my family's already strong fear of stings, I felt I had to get them away from that point. I began creeping across the rocks on all fours leaning into the angle to keep all of my weight against gigantic rock face. I felt my way across, placing my feet upon slippery lacy green moss because there were no other ways to go.

There was a slight tingling fear running up and down my backbone, trying to entice me into trembling. I thought, man you are so crazy doing this, you are going to slip and fall. I quickly forced those thoughts from my mind with prayer to my friend, Jesus, whom I knew was there. Working my way up, my fears worsened. Above the rocks was safety, but below that a layer of clay and decaying forest. There were many many holes in the clay of which I knew were caused by insects and presumably due to the numbers we had already seen, yellow jackets.

I could see several directions up and through the clay to safety, but I chose only one, as God seemed to be saying, "Place your foot here, then here and then here." He even showed me the exact things to hold on to. I was given that we must not look to the right nor to the left, but to go straight ahead in complete faith.

I stopped halfway back to my family and asked them to again pray with me because the way was so filled with danger and we must go just the certain way that I had been shown.

As I prayed for His peace and strength and power to circumvent our obstacles, I looked out over the cliff and I saw no end, only distant trees that made me feel we were a good 500 feet above the bottom. I shouted out a prayer that echoed over and over to God, my Father who had sent His Son to be with us in our need. To the God who had all power and dominion above all things both heaven and earth. I was assured that He had control over even this part of His creation and more than that He had heard our cries and was there around about us.

I led Brenda across first holding her so tight and guiding her with her every step of the way.

She placed her feet and held herself exactly as I had been shown.

I then instructed her to go up about 10 feet higher and sit, praying to Jesus that she would not fear.

One by one I brought them to safety, first Margaret, to comfort Brenda, then Theresa, who was always on the verge of panic, then myself, up and over.

I shall never forget the pain and fear that I saw on their faces, especially of Brenda's, tears literally drenching her face; but yet, she trusted in me. In me! I was feeling so helpless, but they looked to me for guidance and security.

Had I failed them?

Was I leading them into more danger?

In like manner, I must trust in God who sent Holy Spirit to guide us.

My cries out to Him must have traveled for miles in the valley below. Who knows who heard? I only know God did and, yes we were led to safety.

Shortly, we were in the cabin arriving just as it became dark.

What to do now?

Brenda might swell like she usually did with insect bites of any kind, much less so many hornet stings many which were around her temple. We prayed for God's miraculous healing touch and bathed her in cold water.

She reacted as if nothing was wrong. No additional swelling, and even at that, most of it was almost gone. We continued to pray for God's healing Brenda. Knowing there was no way that we could travel the roads at night and find our way to a city for help, and that we felt assured that God had heard us and was taking care of Brenda's needs; we all settled in for the night.

Margaret and I took turns checking Brenda.

She slept peacefully without swelling.

The remote cabin was almost 100 miles away from a hospital emergency room. Despite our assurances we could not sleep. The cabin, which belonged to a doctor, had an extensive collection of books. There was a wall to wall book shelf at the head of the bed. I reached up without looking and plucked a book from the shelf. It was a book on insect bites and stings. We had done all the wrong things for Brenda. It was scary to know that all we had done to comfort her was wrong. I told Margaret that Satan was trying to trick us into not trusting in the Lord. It almost worked. We checked her even more often.

No change. Still sleeping peacefully without swelling. Our only hope was in the Lord. We clung to that hope while finally falling asleep.

The next morning Brenda was bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, ready to tackle the wilds of the woods, to go exploring again. No one else was.

To this day Brenda still has bad reactions to insect stings or bites.

God protected our whole family when we were in need. He saved us in many ways.

I shall never forget the sound of the walking stick that slipped out of my hand falling over the cliff and clanging down the 500 foot drop to the bottom, or my echoing anguished cries out in prayer to a God who cares when a father leads his family in a wrong turn. And most of all, the look on my family's faces, wanting to see assurance and strength. They saw what they needed in me because we all found what we needed in the Lord.

He loves us all and adopted us as His own. He knows our rising, our falling, and our stillness, and wants to guide us on our way to our safely.