

Walking with God in Broken Places



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and
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...and lessons I've learned along the way!

WALKING WITH GOD IN BROKEN PLACES
And
Lessons I Learned Along the Way

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DEDICATION

To the men of the Texas Baptist Men's Organization who have been my partners in these adventures and to their three leaders: Bob Dixon, Jim Furgerson, and Leo Smith who have given me leadership and the freedom to serve God without reservation.

Also, to my wonderful family, my wife needs a Purple Heart and a Green Beret for walking with me for 56 years of this kind of ministry. And, my two children, John II and Lydia who have joined me in God's service to the people in many of these broken places.

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WALKING WITH GOD IN BROKEN PLACES

And

Lessons I Learned Along the Way

Introduction

This manuscript is an attempt to record what I have seen God do. I write this with the realization that many who read these pages were with me when these events occurred. This is a proof factor which I am happy to have, because some of the events may have the appearance of being “dressed up a little” to make a better story. Anything of this nature is totally unnecessary when God shows up and does His work.

The span of time from which these accounts are drawn is from 1967 to 2007. There is no way I can cram 40 years of walking with God into one volume. A part of the story of God’s activity in my life that precedes this period is found in the book, “Divorcing? Remember Me”. The reason I say only a part of the story is found there is because it reflects the part of the path that led me to walking with God. It was the part where I discovered it is only when I am obedient to Him that I am truly free. This manuscript is some excerpts from the rest of the story.

Chapter 1

First Mobile Clinic-A New Work

The East Texas Junior College Group was my responsibility in 1967. I was the director of the Baptist Student Ministries in four colleges. They were Kilgore College, Henderson County Junior College (now called Trinity Valley College), Panola College, and Le Tourneau College. My responsibilities included counseling, activity programming, being the administrator for four student center buildings, and teaching 11 hours of college credit Bible classes for three of the colleges each week.

My responsibilities to the state Baptist Student Ministries Department included being chairman of the Summer Missions Committee. We interviewed student volunteers, selected the ones we felt were qualified, and provided the funds and equipment they would need for their summer ministry.

There was a medical/dental project scheduled that had me concerned. It would need special equipment, professional volunteers, and supplies.

Two weeks before the student missionary's training meeting, I was preparing a Bible class lecture for Kilgore College. I was reading the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verses 12-15. These verses in the King James Version of the Bible say, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it. If ye love me, keep my commandments."

I had read this scripture many times. The first book of the Bible I ever read from start to finish was the Gospel of John when I was 17 years old. But, this time it was like a literary speed bump and my mind was jostled by the statements. It said that if I had faith, I could do what Jesus did, and that I would be able to do even greater things! Whoa! What did it say? I read and reread the verses. Was my life marked by the wisdom and power of Jesus' life? I considered myself to be a faithful believer and servant of the Lord. But, I was aware of my struggles, my pleading prayers for daily needs to be met, my constant worrying about my son's health problems, and his illnesses.

Do what Jesus did? Where was I missing it? I stopped my lesson study and started pulling books from my library: the Parallel Gospels, Strong's Concordance, and others. I made an exhaustive list of everything Jesus did. As I reviewed the list, it became evident that everything He did fell into two categories: He met human need where He found it and He introduced people to God. He met needs in order to introduce people to God. I leaned back in my chair, stared at the ceiling and began to ask myself, "How much of my life as a Christian met human needs and introduced people to God?"

There were times in my hyperactive life where I felt like the bumper sticker statement was a true description of my life, "Jesus is coming again, look busy!" I realized that very little of my life actually met human need, as a matter of fact I usually avoided people with needs. I did not have the time or the resources to meet anyone else's needs. At the time, a BSU director's salary was one step ahead of the poverty program. What resources to help others? Where would they come from? Uh, oh, Jesus said ask! I knew what the Bible said, but mentally I was applying the modern Christian detraction factor. It says, "Well that was meant for the disciples,

or, that probably refers to missionaries or to other important believers doing big things for God, but not to us as ordinary Christians. Wrong! The scripture was speaking to me.

All my life as a believer had been focused on evangelism, so, introducing people to God was not new to me. My daily activities in counseling frequently gave me the opportunity to share my faith with students and to introduce them to my savior, Jesus. However, there were many times when my church activities and my BSU activities kept me so busy that I did not spend time seeking the nonchristians; I only talked to those who came to me as seekers. I became convicted about the amount of time and effort wasted on “busy work” in my religious life.

These verses became the focus of my prayer time, they became the object of my meditation, and they became the constant thought that resurfaced every time my mind was not actively working on a project. I spent a week unpacking the truth in these verses.

After that first week, I was facing a deadline for summer missions meeting preparation. We were sending a medical and dental team to the Rio Grande River Valley of Texas, the border with Mexico. It was composed of two nursing students and one dental student. Their job was to hold clinics in the villages along the river. They would be assisting volunteer dentists and medical doctors. My deadline involved obtaining the equipment and supplies they would need, and providing transportation for them.

The only thing greater than my enthusiasm was my ignorance of what was needed for the project and how to move it. I went to visit my personal physician in Tyler, Texas, Dr. Kerfoot Walker. I asked him what would be needed for setting up temporary village clinics in rural areas. Dr. Walker’s reply was, “Get a note pad and write the list as I talk. You will need a private area, cotton swabs, tongue depressors ...” and the list went on for two and a half pages.

When he paused for a breath, he asked to see the list. He thumbed through the pages, thoughtfully, and then commented, “It is going to take a truck to haul this stuff. It will take a day to pack it up and a day to move it to a new location for the next set up.” I replied, “Kerfoot, I do not have a truck and I cannot lose two days every time the clinic goes to a new location. The summer program only lasts ten weeks and that would make a drastic reduction in the number of villages we could help.”

Kerfoot said, “Yes, that is not the best way to do this. Let’s pray and see what God wants to do.”

The following scene was etched in my memory that Sunday night. Before I had fully understood his statement, he was already on his knees beside the dining room table talking to God. The reason I was so impressed by what he said, was that he was talking to God like I had heard him talk to his nurses! “God, this clinic project is to meet people’s physical needs so they will listen as they are told about you. Now, I have no part in this and it is not for my benefit that I pray. But, this is an important project for your glory, so, would you show John how to do it, in Jesus name, amen.” He was getting back in his chair before I was able to get on my knees. I looked up and he said, “Get up. That is sufficient. Now, let’s continue the list.”

I thought, “I better pray more about this when I get home. This is a heavy project and I better spend a lot more time praying for God to move on this.”

I had underestimated the power of this layman’s prayer.

At three a.m. on Monday morning, I popped awake, wide awake. I wondered why I was so awake and alert at this hour. I felt my wife’s feet, they were warm. Well, that did not wake me. I did not need to go to the bathroom. Why in the world am I awake? I thought about it for a moment, then I prayed, “Father, is there something you have been trying to tell me that I have

been too busy to hear?" His answer was a divine, "Unh Huh." (For non-southerners, that means yes). I prayed, "Yes, Sir. I will meet you in the kitchen!"

I went to the kitchen table with my Bible and my note pad. If He was going to tell me something, I certainly wanted to write it down. I sat at the table and prayed, "Father, I do not know what you want so I am going to sit here and read my Bible until You put your thoughts in my mind. I am free until I go to work at 8:30 a.m."

I opened the Bible to the scripture that had been foremost in my mind for the last eight days, John 14:12-15. Suddenly it dawned on me; I should claim this promise in reference to the medical mission project.

I asked the Father to show me how to make the clinic project work, how to make it mobile. Mobile clinic, wow that is what I need! I wondered where one could be found, how much would one cost, how big would it need to be? Kerfoot's examining rooms are about eight feet by ten feet; a dentist always has his hand in your mouth, which is only an arm's length away. The height would not be more than six and a half to seven feet. I realized that a school bus was that size.

I began to list on my pad: mobile clinic, school bus, examining table, dental chair...I prayed for a design. I prayed for help. I prayed for resources like money and equipment. I began to draw a design on quadrille paper.

God got me up at three a.m. five days in a row. I never get up at three a.m.! I had rather stay up until three than try to get up at three! But, when you have a Divine appointment with the Father, you eagerly await the hour. I was filled with anticipation every evening and excited about what God was up to.

Friday morning I showed my wife the completed clinic design and a three page parts list. Also, on Friday morning, I made a contract with God. I told him that I would be obedient and trust the scripture. Jesus said that if I needed anything to do God's work that I was to ask the Father for it in His name and He would send it. I did a completely non Baptist thing, I promised that I would not ask anybody for anything, but would only ask Him. I promised to only answer questions that people asked me, but not publicize the project or the needs. I am not sure that most folks can imagine what a leap of faith this was. I was facing a deadline for production and sitting at the kitchen table on Friday with only my Bible and a notepad full of lists and drawings. And, the summer mission retreat started that night at the Mt. Lebanon Conference Center near Dallas.

All of the summer mission volunteers, the missions committee, the state Baptist Student Ministry staff, and the Director of the State Missions Commission, Dr. Charles Mc Laughlin, attended. During the meeting, I spoke to Dr. W.F. Howard, the director of the Texas BSM program, about the mobile clinic idea. I did not break my promise to the Father by asking for anything, but I was certainly trying to bend my promise by hinting. Dr. Howard did not get the hint. He said, "That is a great idea! See what you can do about it." He handled the BSM budget, but he never took the hint.

I was instantly convicted of my attempted manipulation. I retired to a chair in the corner of the room and started repenting. Dr. McLaughlin came to my side and asked, "Did I hear you mention a mobile clinic?" "Yes sir," I replied.

"Where are you going to get it?" he asked.

"We are going to build it, sir!" I smilingly replied.

"What do you need?" he asked.

I said, "Everything, sir."

He asked, "What about money?"

I immediately shot back, "Oh, that is a great place to begin, Dr. Charlie!"

He promised to send a check Monday.

I returned to the Kilgore College BSM building on Monday, taught my two Bible classes, and drove to Longview, Texas, for my evening meeting at Le Tourneau College. There was a liquor store near the campus. As I drove by it, I saw a school bus on the liquor store parking lot with a "for sale" sign in the window. I parked beside it, looked it over, then, my wife and I had a brief prayer about the bus. I felt encouraged to think this was the vehicle I needed.

Next was a huge step of faith; I went into the liquor store to ask the price. The step of faith was not about the price, it was about being seen going into a liquor store! No Baptist gossipers would wait to see that I came out empty-handed!

The bus price was \$750. That alone should tell you the condition of the bus. The owner of the bus lived in Carthage, Texas, the location of my Panola College BSU. When I called him, he reduced the price to \$650 since it was for a "church project", as he called it.

Dr. McLaughlin's check for \$400 arrived on Wednesday. I called the owner and asked if \$400 and a tax letter for \$250 would do? He said no to my proposition and said only \$650 would get the bus.

By this time, I was spending an hour to an hour and a half every day in prayer for the project. My mind would not shutdown at bedtime. I kept a pad and pencil by my bed as design details would emerge, ideas on parts and equipment resources would come to mind, and construction methods were thought through. I would pray myself to sleep, awaken in the night and pray, get on my knees long before daylight and pray, and pray as I drove from campus to campus.

God put the project in high gear and put "the pedal to the metal" on Friday, May 12, 1967! The morning mail contained a letter from my boss at the foundry in Beaumont, Texas, where I had worked during high school, Mr. Cecil Worley. He wrote, "Dear John, I do not know why I am writing this letter. All I know is that God has told me to send you \$250. You know that I do not do things like this. What is going on with you? What are you doing that caused God to do this to me? Let me know as soon as possible. I still can't believe I am doing this, but enclosed is a check for \$250, Sincerely, Cecil."

I called the bus owner and said that I had the money and was coming to get the bus. He informed me that he had moved it back to Carthage, and another man wanted the bus also. "The first one here with the money gets the bus," he said. The urgency called for a real leap of faith...I asked a student to give me a ride to Carthage! The term "wild ride" would not do the journey justice! But we were the first ones there with the cash. I was breathless, but blessed.

The next real act of faith was telling the student he could return to Kilgore without test driving the bus. The papers were signed, the money was given, and I had the keys. When the engine finally caught and began to run, I noticed a cloud of black smoke out of the exhaust. I thought, "Hmm, carburetor needs repair." I pressed the clutch pedal to the floor and the gears made a grinding noise as they engaged. I muttered, "Needs a new clutch, I think." Just then, the former owner ran up to the driver's window and shouted a bit of unwanted additional information over the noise of the engine, "I forgot to tell you that the brakes don't work!" That was when I fully realized that I actually had \$650 worth of school bus.

The route home was from Carthage to Henderson and from Henderson to Kilgore, about 45 miles and one traffic circle where five highways intersected. The clincher was the five o'clock traffic had started. I never cease to be amazed by the many ways that God can use to

intensify and upgrade my prayer life. As I rolled down the driveway and turned on the farm to market road, I did not have time for a King James Version of prayer: I just said, "Oh, God! Get me home safely...with the bus. You said that this was the one to buy, so you take care of it, please!"

God is definitely the great economist. He never wastes anything, not even youthful experiences. I spent my fifteenth summer working in a cousin's auto repair shop in Alabaster, Alabama. I bought a 1929 model A Ford from a junk dealer in Montevallo, Alabama. I paid two cents per pound for it, \$36 total. It had a few idiosyncrasies. For instance, no brakes, no second gear, the door latch was broken and the door flew open regularly, and the radiator would tilt back into the fan if the hill was steep. The simple remedy for the radiator was to stop, turn around, and back up over the hill...no problem. Stopping without brakes was a bit more complicated, but, on this trip the procedure was most valuable. The procedure is to double clutch, rev up the engine, shift to a lower gear, repeat this until first gear is engaged, then turn off the ignition. The last step for a complete stop was to turn the ignition back on and cram the gears into reverse, while accelerating the engine. The only real problem with this procedure was when the ignition was turned on after unburned gasoline had collected in the muffler. It produced an explosion that sounded like one stick of dynamite in a pipe bomb. Usually some cars behind you would swerve a little, thinking they may have had a blowout or that they were being ambushed.

Using the skills developed as a teenage boy, I got home unbent and accident free. However, I may have improved some other folk's prayer life as well.

I parked the bus in my backyard, kissed and thanked my wife who had been praying for me, took my tool box out, and started looking for hydraulic leaks.

It was the left rear wheel. I sat down beside it and prayed, "Lord, I have never worked on this type axle before. I know it is called a floating axle. I do not know what it is floating in or how it works. Either show me how to do this or send someone who knows how, in Jesus name, Amen."

Before I was able to get the cap off the axle, my gate slammed. It was Mr. Waller from my Sunday school class. "Hi, Brother John, I heard you were going to build a clinic. What are you doing right now?" I told him that I did not know what I was doing, but the brakes are broken and I am trying to fix them. I added that I had never worked on this type of axle...I never finished my statement. He began to say, "Well, under the cap you will find a crown nut secured by a cotter key. Now that holds the bearings..." And he was interrupted by his wife who said, "Honey, do it for him. After all you are the maintenance manager for East Texas Motor Freight!" He spent three days in my yard and rebuilt the entire brake system.

Five men in First Baptist Church of Kilgore, Texas, had volunteered to pray for the clinic project. These men were prayer warriors! One of them was Dr. Charles Whiteside, head of the chemistry department, at Kilgore College. The first night the bus was in my yard Dr. Whiteside called and asked if he could do more than pray. He said that he wanted to help build the clinic. I replied, "By all means! I am happy to have the help. When you come, bring a friend." He came every day and always brought other workers.

The school bus arrived at my home on Friday night, May 12. When we started construction on Saturday, May 13, we had 22 days to turn it into a medical/dental clinic and two days to transport it to Harlingen, Texas.

Dr. Whiteside probably had no idea about what he was tackling. Because all of us were employed, our folks could only work after the close of the business day. We worked every evening and every other night we worked from sundown to sunrise. We prayed before starting to

work, we prayed while we worked, we prayed when we stopped working, and we prayed throughout the day. I had given the workers a parts list and told them to pray for our needs.

Soon, word about the clinic project spread all over town. In small towns like Kilgore, information quickly moves from an announcement at church to the beauty shop, to the barber shop, to the coffee shop, and to the work shop. People were moved by the mission of the project and wanted to be a part of it. Members of several churches from various denominations stopped by my home to look at the project. Some made monetary donations, some donated supplies or equipment, and some came back to join the labor force. Information spread to other cities as well, when families called or wrote to relatives and mentioned the clinic. A dentist from Fort Worth, Dr. Dan White, called and offered a complete dental operatory. He said that the dental chair was old enough to be in a museum. It was a non-electric, hand operated chair, but it still worked. It was perfect for our situation.

A building contractor came to see the project and donated a generator. My secretary, Mrs. Hare, asked if her husband could help. I gladly accepted the offer, but I asked her if he knew that he was being donated.

Let me interject a sequence at this point. The project had been broken down into a series of tasks. Before each task was to be done, we would pray that the workers and skills needed to accomplish the task would come to the work site. They never failed to appear as needed.

For instance: I needed to build a steel platform on the rear of the bus to hold the generator, the propane tanks, and the large water tank. I needed a steel plate, angle iron, channel iron, a welder with equipment, and some way to support the steel while the fabrication was done. I asked my secretary how her husband was employed and she replied, "He is a welder." "Does he have his own equipment?" I queried. "Oh, yes. He will also bring our 18 year old son tonight," she replied.

When Mr. Hare came that evening he said, "I thought you might need some supplies, so I brought some scrap metal that I had around the shop." He had everything on my prayer list including a six foot, 200 pound son who could hold all the steel in place while he welded it.

This sequence of prayer and divine provision was repeated many times. We continually claimed the promise Jesus made in the 14th chapter of John. However, many times God fulfilled His promise in Isaiah 65: 24, "Even before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear." Frequently, I would say, "That is an answer to our prayer!" And, also frequently, things would come or things would happen and I would say, or think, "Wow, I wish I had prayed for that! But, it came before I had an opportunity to pray!"

I had been asked by the pastor of The First Baptist Church of Athens, Texas, to preach in his absence on Sunday May 21. I spoke about how Jesus used common men in His ministry as disciples.

After the services were over, I was approached by Jim Wren; he was a corporate pilot for an oil company and the owner of a real estate and insurance company. Jim said, "Brother John, I appreciate your message, but I have a problem with it. I am a layman with no church work skills. I cannot sing or preach, I cannot teach in Sunday school. There is not a handle in God's kingdom that fits my hand. What can I do?" I told him that I would be at the HCJC Baptist Student Building on Wednesday and would be happy to meet with him and discuss the possibilities. He asked if he could bring a friend, Ed Nusko, who was a banker and had been experiencing the same problem. I told him to bring anyone who wanted to seek ways to serve God. I sensed God was up to something special, so I spent a lot of time praying for wisdom and

guidance. There was no way I could have dreamed what was about to happen to the three of us as God put our lives together in ministry.

Monday brought disturbing news. I called Dr. McLaughlin and asked him to send the information I needed to title the clinic bus to the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He said that the BGCT was not set up to own that type of property. Their attorney would not let them accept the liability of a mobile clinic. Since it was in my name, I thought, "Well it is in my name, so I guess the liability will be on me. Lord Jesus, this is your project give me wisdom and protection."

I met Jim and Ed on Wednesday. We had prayer together, talked about our professions, and discussed ministry opportunities for laymen. The meeting ended about midmorning and as I left Jim's office, I told him about my clinic liability problem. I thought his work in insurance might hold an answer. He said that I needed to form a nonprofit corporation to hold the title. I asked how to do that. Jim said, "Wait a minute, let me call the city attorney and see if he will help us."

He called the city attorney immediately, hung up, and said, "He is waiting for us, let's hurry over. He asked what to name the corporation. Do you have any ideas?" As we crossed the street to the courthouse, I told him it would need to be a Spanish name that sounded friendly. "We could name it AMIGOS. No, that is already in use by a mission group from Houston. I had written a literacy curriculum for that group. Let me think. It will work on both sides of the border, internationally. Hey, Jim, that is it! We will call it AMIGOS INTERNACIONALES." The corporation quickly received its nonprofit status and its 501 (c) 3 tax exempt designation as well.

We were in business! But, as I said earlier, this is one of those things that I did not have the knowledge to pray for specifically. God just took over and did His stuff. So often I prayed for one thing and God did another that made things so much better than that for which I had prayed. It was like stumbling and falling, but landing upstairs!

An example of this would be the night we were doing body work on the bus. We were preparing it for the air conditioning installation. We prayed for the needed parts and supplies for the medical examining and treatment room. The dental operatory was already complete. We prayed for safety as we worked. By 2 a.m., everyone had gone home and I was on top of the bus using a cutting torch. A rusty spot in the metal popped like a firecracker when the flame hit it. A piece of hot slag hit my shirt and ricocheted into my face shield, landing in the corner of my right eye. The left eye went into a sympathetic reaction and I was blind!

I turned off the torch and was kneeling on the bus roof praying, "Oh, God, how could this happen? I prayed for safety. If I am taken out by this injury, who can finish this project since most of it is in my head? Father, do not let Satan get a victory here. Overcome the action of the devil. I know he hates this project. Father, how could you let this happen? Please help me!"

I groped around the roof until I felt the top of the ladder. I eased myself on to it, trying not to knock it down or slide off the roof. I walked into the back of the house, felt around until I found the kitchen door, and went in to the table. I called my wife's name until she awakened and joined me there. I explained what had happened and she called our family doctor, Dr. Robert Echols. He got up and met us at his clinic.

As he treated my injury, he asked all sorts of questions about the mobile clinic, its mission, its staffing, its equipment, and our progress in the construction. When he asked about the equipment for the medical area, I told him that we did not have any yet. "What do you need?" he asked, and I began to quote from the Dr. Kerfoot Walker section of my prayer list.

After hearing my list, he said, "I just remodeled my clinic and I have all of that stuff in storage. Send a truck over and pick it up." What I thought was a devastating development turned out to be a tremendous blessing. I had to repent of my sin of accusing God of sleeping on the job.

I learned a very important lesson. Never let a problem come between you and God, which separates you from Him. Always stand with Him on His side of the problem so He can work with you to solve it.

May 28th was the last Sunday before the clinic was to be delivered. We had five working days to finish it. I was to preach at the Central Baptist Church in Carthage, Texas that day. I stepped out in my backyard and surveyed the bus. It looked awful. I had a strong sense of God's presence with me as I walked around it. The grass around it had been destroyed by our work; the bus body was a patchwork of yellow paint, iron oxide primer, smut and rust. I prayed, "Lord, this thing looks terrible and I want it to look good for you. I hate to think something that looks this bad would be associated with your name. Would you please send me a painter with painting equipment and some paint? I don't care what color, just whatever color you want it to be. I also need a rebuilt carburetor, a rebuilt transmission, and six recapped tires. Father, I think paint, a painter, \$500, and five days will wrap up the project. I am asking in Jesus name and in response to John 14:12-15.

After the morning worship service at Central Baptist Church, only one person asked about the clinic. "How is the project progressing?" he asked. My reply was straight off my prayer list, "We need paint, a painter, \$500, and five days of hard labor." He replied, "That is wonderful! We are praying for you at prayer meeting every Wednesday."

When I entered my home that night, my wife Dr. L, said, "Honey, the painter you prayed for this morning came by at 2 p.m. today. He is from Longview, Texas. He looked over the project and told me that God had called him to ministry when he was young, but he never responded to the call. He said that he wanted the privilege of painting the bus as a part of his repentance for being disobedient earlier."

Dr. L. added, "Oh yes, he asked about the paint. I told him we did not have any, but we were praying for it. He asked about the color and I told him any color God sent is what we would use. He looked at me quizzically, and said that he had never done this before, but he would be here on Monday morning."

The next morning, Monday, at breakfast my kitchen door burst open; there stood a man in painter's clothes with a wild look of astonishment on his face. I looked at my wife and asked, "Is this the painter?"

Before she could say, yes, he blurted out, "You will not believe what just happened to me! I got out of bed at 5:30 this morning and when my feet hit the floor the name of a man from our church popped into mind. I called and got him up. I asked him where he worked in the Trailmobile Trailer factory and he said it was in the finishing department. I told him about the clinic and asked if he had any surplus paint. He said that he had just finished a contract and had ten gallons of DuPont white and five gallons of goldenrod yellow left over. I went by the factory and picked it up immediately. I had no idea that God worked like this!"

The painter worked for three days and gave us a white bus with bright yellow fenders and trim. He was so happy that he sang as he worked! He worked very fast, so fast that when I opened the bus door, just a crack, to tighten a bolt; he sprayed the top of my head! That night, when I looked in the mirror, my head and my crew cut had a white stripe down the middle. I looked like a Volkswagen Bug with a racing stripe!

A stranger came to the project on Wednesday offering to help. When asked about his building skills, he replied, "All I can do is be a 'gofer', I can go for this and go for that to help the workers." I told him that he was welcome and gave him a "gofer" job. The bus needed six wheels for tube type tires because it came with tubeless tire wheels. The rough terrain and tire repair facilities in the border area made this a necessity. I gave him all of the money I had, \$40, which was not nearly enough, and the yellow pages phone book. We had prayer and he left in a borrowed pickup truck. He returned in an hour and asked, "Will these wheels do the job?"

They were perfect! I asked where he found them and he told this story, "I got in the truck, had prayer for direction, opened the phone book, and one junk dealer's add seemed to click with me. It was the closest one to us. When I pulled into the scrap yard, the owner stepped out of the office to greet me. I told him what we were doing and asked about the six truck wheels. He thought a moment and told me to back out into his driveway and look in the grass beside it. Before he opened the front gate for the day's business, he saw a lady drive up and dump some wheels there from her truck. "If they are what you need, take them, no charge." he said. I measured them and checked the lug bolt pattern; they seemed perfect! By the way, here is the \$40 that I did not need."

"Man! You have been a miracle worker today! Now, if you could just find a sign painter for me," I laughed. His face brightened and he said, "Sign painting is my hobby! What can I do for you?" It took two days, but he put beautiful signs around the bus. However, in my fatigued state I misspelled Internacionales. I used the English spelling Internationales, and he painted it just like I wrote it. It was never corrected in all the years the clinic was in service.

A call came at 9 p.m. It was from the man who had asked about the clinic in Carthage the previous Sunday. He told me the church had voted in prayer meeting to give us \$500 for the project. I shouted, "Glory! Can I get the check tomorrow?" He said, "Yes, we will have it ready in the morning."

When I finished my morning classes, I drove to Central Baptist Church in Carthage and picked up the check. I stopped in Henderson and purchased six recapped tires and tubes. I had called the Henderson Chevrolet company earlier and discovered he had the only rebuilt bus transmission in east Texas. They also had the carburetor I needed. I loaded everything into my old Dodge Town Wagon (It was fire engine red with BSU painted down both sides; the students referred to it as the BSU Bomb!), and headed home.

On the way, reality set in. I had the equipment but I had not asked the Father for the needed workers. I looked at the transmission on the rear floor and prayed, "Father, I need help. The transmission is so big it will take two men to lift it into place. I can handle the carburetor, so, would you please send two men who know how to install the transmission. I'm asking in Jesus name and for your glory."

Thirty minutes after I prayed, I rolled up in my driveway and saw two of my students from Le Tourneau College. They asked, "Brother John, can we help on the clinic tonight?"

My answer was, "Oh YES! Can you handle a transmission?"

They said, "We are automotive engineering students and we worked transmissions in lab last semester."

I replied, "Your challenging evening's work is on the rear floorboard."

I grabbed the carburetor and dived under the hood, but as I was finishing my job, they said, "We hate to tell you this, but the transmission does not fit."

At this point, I had seen God do so much that I immediately dumped the problem in His lap. "Father God, you know that we only have about 30 hours before this unit heads south. Help

us. I was told that this was the only part available in this area that fit this bus. Please show us what to do, in Jesus name, amen!”

Immediately, one of the students yelled, “I’ve got it! Bring both transmissions to the garage floor.” They dismantled both units and laid the parts in rows. Their next step was like magic as they assembled a transmission by swapping the necessary parts to make one that did fit and work properly. It is amazing how you are able to work when you sense the presence of the Heavenly Father at your shoulder watching you work approvingly. He was at home with us in the garage just as He had been in the carpenter’s shop. He seemed to give us the skills to do whatever was needed just as He had done in the Old Testament with Tubal Cain, to whom He gave the knowledge and ability to do foundry work with brass and iron.

The next day was Friday, the last full day to finish the clinic. It was a whirlwind day! Tires to be installed, air conditioner installed on the roof...uh, oh, major problem...there was no duct work to get the air throughout the bus. I had intended to get this done, but it did not make the daily list to be accomplished. A prayer went up. A prayer of the, “OH, GOD... variety.” No time for King James Biblical English.

About noon, a man drove up and said, “My wife said I should come by and see if there is anything we can do to help you.” I asked what he did for living and he said, “I own an air conditioning and heating company.”

He must have thought that I was a lunatic from the way I responded. I told him about our need and our prayer. I told him that, in addition to being an engineer he was an answer to prayer. He climbed on top of the bus and began to measure and design the special plenum needed. He climbed down and asked when I needed the ducts. I told him that the bus had to leave at 5 a.m. in the morning. He did a double take and groaned, “5 a.m. tomorrow morning? Oh, brother, I better get busy!”

He brought the sheet metal parts, perfectly fabricated, at 3 a.m. I put them in the bus, loaded a tool kit for their installation in the Valley, had a prayer of thanksgiving with the crew, and got an hour and a half of sleep. That was all the rest I had in two days.

It was at this point that the Elijah syndrome set in. He had an incredible encounter with God on Mount Carmel. He had seen God do great miracles. But without food and rest he began to assume that he was the only one who could do what God wanted done. He had literally run himself in the ground and in this weakened state Satan stepped in and convinced him that he alone was God’s capable servant. It was at that point that he caved in to depression and asks God to take him out.

It was slightly different for me. I bought the bus, I designed and built the clinic, I had lived with this project day and night, and I was the only one with a commercial driver’s license to drive the bus. Did you notice how many “I’s” are in that sentence? That was the problem; pride had slowly crept in. It showed up clothed in righteousness and servanthood. God was about to teach me a valuable lesson.

The family got me packed up, coffeed me up, prayed up, and kissed me good bye at 5 a.m. sharp. The plan called for me to pick up one nursing student at Baylor School of Nursing in Dallas, to pick up the other nursing student in Fort Worth, turn south and pick up Bobby Johnson at Mary-Hardin Baylor University in Belton, Texas. Bobby was the eighteen year old brother of the Director of Missions for the Magic Valley Baptist Association in Harlingen, Texas, where the clinic was going to be stationed.

The lesson began. By the time I reached Belton, I was out of caffeine, energy, and good sense. Every now and then I would doze, drift to the shoulder of the road, awaken with the noise

of loose gravel, and continue to drive in a stupor between road hypnosis and stupidity. But, I had a schedule I had to keep, people were depending on the clinic's arrival, a Sunday dedication service was planned, and a volunteer dentist was due to work on Monday.

The lesson continued. Bobby kept talking to me to keep me awake and often he would say, "Brother John, would you like for me to drive?" I was thinking, "Uh, I can just see an eighteen year old trying to handle this rig. He might wreck this bus after all the time I have put into it."

"No thanks, I can handle it," was my standard reply. After he asked for the umpteenth time, I thought I would shut him up by showing him his inability. "Have you ever driven a truck?" I asked. I was surprised when he gave me an affirmative answer, but I canceled it out in my mind by thinking it was probably a pickup truck.

However, I had to get him to realize that I meant a commercial truck. "What kind of truck was it and what did you do with it?" I queried. "It was an International cab over rig and I delivered mobile homes all over the nation for a manufacturer in south Texas."

I pulled over on the shoulder of the road and ask him to repeat what he said, in case I misunderstood. He repeated it. I climbed out of the driver's seat and into the dental chair, adjusted it for comfort and fell sound asleep.

Lesson learned!

God will surround us with everything necessary to accomplish His will. But, if our sense of pride and self-importance blinds us to God's work and we go on working in the power of our flesh, we will fail, or the results will be only what we can produce. When that happens, we miss seeing what only God can produce through our obedience and humility.

I slept for the next 300 miles; I slept all night, and just got up in time for the dedication service.

Our prayers for a volunteer dentist were answered by the dentist who donated the dental equipment, Dr. Dan White from Fort Worth. His wife, Ann, was a dental hygienist. The staff organized the clinic on Monday at the Los Vecinos Baptist Mission, and treated over 100 patients the first day.

Dr. White said, "I can work faster, but I cannot witness any faster!" He shared his faith with every youth and adult he treated. Many of them came to faith in Christ as their savior.

While they worked in the clinic, I was working on the clinic, installing the air conditioning duct work on the roof.

Dan and his wife were a great team. They also spent the evenings on the telephone enlisting other volunteer dentists and physicians. Before they left, they had every week covered! An absolute miracle!

The clinic bus served many years in the Rio Grande Valley and eventually became a pediatric clinic in Mexico. There were eventually a total of 17 clinics built. They served in the United States and foreign countries.

What I could not do, God called others to do. The way the project developed, He kept all the bases covered, even the bases that we did not even think about.

This would have driven a long range planner to despair. As a matter of fact, the CPA, Marlin Smith of Athens, Texas, who volunteered to do our finances and pay our bills would call me and say he had invoices on his desk and no money in the bank. I would tell him not to worry, the mail had not come yet, but when it did come the necessary funds would be in it. And they were. But, it certainly made him nervous. Prayers were not answered in our time, but they were answered in time.

When the project was completed and every bill was paid, I had \$400 left in the clinic account. Was that surplus? No, to me it meant that God had something else in His plan. I was to wait and hold the funds until He gave me guidance. Did He have something else in His plan? Oh, Boy! Did He ever!

But that is another story...

Chapter 2

Preparation for Disaster Relief

The clinic work, as a project of BSU Summer Missions, culminated in August of 1967. In October of that year, a hurricane named “Beulah” struck the lower Gulf coast of Texas. The track of the hurricane after land fall was up the valley of the Rio Grande River; the border of Texas and Mexico.

Tornados, flooding, heavy winds driving torrential rains, tidal surge; all of this left a wide path of destruction on both sides of the river. When the news and damage estimates began to fill every media outlet in our area, my concern grew heavier each day. I prayed, “Father, I feel such a burden for this tragedy. Am I to have a part in this? Are you using my heartbreak for the victims to call me into service? Tell me what to do, make me sensitive to their needs. You are my only guide in this uncharted venture; like the mobile clinic, I’ve never done anything like this before. You are my only resource, but you said in the Gospel of John 14:12-15 that you are all I need. You proved this to be true in the clinic project. My trust is in you alone. What do I do? In Jesus name I make this request.”

All that day and all that night my brain would not shut down, or even slow down. My planning pad was rapidly filling with action plans, people to contact, jurisdictional authorities to notify, etc.

I worked with 12 Baptist Associations that had connections with my colleges. Each director of missions was asked about the response of their local churches were making to the disaster. The replies were almost exactly the same from each one, “Our people would like to do something, but they do not know what to do or even where to start! Do you have any ideas?” My reply was the same to each one, “We are putting something together. I sense God wants us to respond. Please, standby for a call with details.”

Details? Details! I had no idea about what to do but pray! Oh, boy did I pray! I had no plan at all, much less details. But, I knew God worked best when my plans were not in His way.

Some people have often said, “La Noue is a Cajun and he does not plan. He flies by the seat of his pants.” What they have never understood is that I am not flying by the seat of my pants. I am flying on angel wings and prayer is the wind beneath those wings.

The problem is the fact that God only gives me light for my uplifted foot as I walk with Him. Perhaps if I were not such a “jump and run, and git ‘er done” type person, God could give me more advance notice of what He is up to.

His will requires His timing; not just action. My timing swings from impetuous to procrastination, so the Lord usually manages me by control of information. The lesson I have had to learn is not to move, to stay on alert, but not to deploy until God says, “Go.” When that happens, do not delay. Most of my experiences with God given opportunities has been there is a time element, “Move on it, or lose it.” The plan took shape. Four Associational offices agreed to be collection depots. They were centrally located in the proper areas.

I called various businesses who donated the use of semi trailers for storage at the sites and for transportation when they were full. They also donated semi tractors (eighteen wheelers) and drivers for each trip.

The seed money necessary to start this operation was the \$400 left in the Amigos account from the clinic construction. Various farm cooperatives were contacted. When they responded, we could buy 100lbs of beans for \$13, and 100lbs of rice for \$11. This news was circulated to the Baptist churches in the 12 associations and they responded! Food, money to buy beans and rice, clothing, bedding, and some furniture came flooding in!

We were flooding the throne of God with our petitions and He was responding in proportion to our prayers. This was a crash course in the school of prayer for our BSU students. The students saw me as their leader in this, but their professor was less than one page ahead of the students in God's lesson plans. I was a player-coach.

A call to the BGCT State Missions Commission gave us a contact person and a drop off location in Harlingen. The person Dr. McLaughlin sent to the disaster area was Bob Dixon. Bob was the new Royal Ambassador Director. "The Royal Ambassadors" organization was the boy's mission education program of the BGCT's Brotherhood Department. Camping is one of the boy interest activities in their curriculum and camping was what Bob had to do to survive in the river area.

Several of us in the BGCT had disaster experience as victims. I had been through heavy floods in Beaumont and Port Arthur, Texas, hurricanes on Galveston Island, and the Texas City explosion. But, no one had been trained in disaster response...except Bob Dixon.

God is just as able to use our ignorance as He is our knowledge. No one knew that Bob had been trained in disaster response by the National Bureau of Mines when he was on the staff of the Tennessee Valley Authority. He was sent basically because he was the new man and low man on the totem pole of authority. But, God was orchestrating the whole operation. We were only the gloves on His hands.

Bob also had a gift for organization and established a "wholesale-Retail" operation to distribute the supplies. He loaded trucks out of the warehouse, which was an aircraft hangar, and sent the supplies to local churches for distribution. He knew that local pastors would know who the truly needy people were in their areas. Many denominations participated.

One humorous facet of the disaster response resulted from the amount of clothing being donated. People who came requesting supplies of food and medicine were told they would be given the supplies, if they would fill any empty space in their truck with clothing. It took several years after the response was over for all of the clothing to be distributed and the hangars emptied.

We had no idea about the Father's plans for the future of disaster response among Texas Baptists. Looking back from the vantage point of the present, I can see how the pieces of the puzzle of God's plan were fitting together.

The inventory at this point would list:

1. Bob Dixon-military training, business experience, disaster training, camping instructor, administrator, and organizational gifts. He was an employee of the BGCT.

2. Dr. Charles McLaughlin- director of the State Missions Commission, World war 2 B-17 pilot, combat experience, experience as a prisoner of war, a tender heart for needy people, a risk taker in trying new ministries, related to me in the mobile clinic construction and operation project, we had a strong mutual respect and friendship. Now he had a new insight into the need for disaster response.

3. John La Noue-Seminary training as pastor and Bible teacher, journalism training, auto mechanic, machine shop and foundry experience, mobile clinic designer and builder, experience in logistics and transportation, commercial driver's license (double and triple trailers, air brakes,

bus, and motorcycle), and a commercial pilot's license, with new experience in disaster response. As a BSU director, I was also an employee of the BGCT.

The disaster event lasted for many months, but Bob, Dr. McLaughlin, and I had to attend the BGCT State Convention meeting in Lubbock. The meeting was in late November of 1967 and I was on the Brotherhood Conference program. I was leading a conference on Medical Missions in south Texas, and Bob Dixon was leading the Royal Ambassador conference. We met for the first time.

The BGCT voted at that meeting to set up the Baptist Men and Boys work as a separate entity. The new organization was named Texas Baptist Men. Bob Dixon became the executive director in 1968.

The stage was being set for a new ministry, a ministry that fully illustrates the truth of the scripture, Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."

When I look at the Beulah disaster response from the secular viewpoint, it seems like a crazy plan. Who would send a children's worker to manage a disaster event, or a student worker to organize and manage the logistics of several hundred thousand pounds of donated goods? God would! After all he used some fishermen and a tax collector to start his church.

For years God had been orchestrating the collection of our life's experiences for their blending in a ministry that no one could imagine.

Chapter 3

Baptist Disaster Relief Begins

The new ministry began to develop in the most unusual way. The BGCT opened a new position in the Church Services Department. It was titled State Youth Director and I was asked to fill the job. The job was created because of my complaints about the spiritual unpreparedness of high school graduates for college life, and there was no one to help small churches find summer youth workers. To fill out the position, the executive director, Dr. T. A. Patterson, added ministry to the military, family ministries, liaison with Baptist camps and conference centers, associational youth work, church related vocational training, youth minister development, plus church recreation and activity ministries. The final addition to the job description was item 16, which said, "And any thing else the supervisor deems proper and necessary."

The Lord had given me a premonition that a change was coming at the BGCT convention meeting. I was exposed to so many missionary needs and to what other segments of the BGCT were doing, my heart was heavy with desire to be a part of all of it. I felt like a starving man who had been taken to a cafeteria. I wanted some of all of it! I discovered that the Women's Missionary Union planned to start a "River Ministry" project in 1968. They employed a friend of mine, Elmin Howell, as the director. He had been the church activities and recreation director at my home church, First Baptist Church of Beaumont, Texas. Elmin asked for the Amigos Internacionales mobile clinic to continue its operation as a part of the River Ministry program. We were happy to have its ministry continue because the BSU project had been completed.

Most of the ministries in which I have been involved have started with a burdened heart for a need or a problem. I usually become sensitized while in prayer as God brings items before me which need prayer. Many things may be on my prayer list, but the Holy Spirit seems to emphasize some that are more important for the time. Many times He will bring something new to my mind and cause me to focus on it for awhile. Sometimes great desire arises in my heart and I must check with Him to know if the desire has arisen from my heart or His. I want to know God's will about things. I do not want His permission to do my will.

The new job offer came in March of 1969. I spent most of April in prayer before I accepted it. This made me a part of the Baptist Building staff in Dallas and a member of the Church Services Division, serving under a magnificent Christian leader, Dr. R. "Hooper" Dilday.

The Baptist Building was crowded, so the only place for my office was in the Texas Baptist Men's office suite.

God was at work!

I had no experience in several of my assignment areas. These areas happened to be where Bob Dixon had a lot of experience. Bob became my mentor and advisor. Being in the same office suite put us in constant contact with each other.

Cameron Byler, a church recreator from Lubbock, and Jerry Bob Taylor, a pastor from Brownwood, were added to the TBM staff shortly after I came to the TBM offices.

The three of them were personality type A+! At times, it was a riot! The three of them not only thought "out side of the box", they did not know the box existed. If they had known about the box, they would have been sitting on it to plan or would have been standing on it to herald their great new ideas.

Bob Dixon told me that I needed to be accredited in some area of recreation to gain the respect of the church recreators in Texas. Since I was an outdoorsman, he suggested I get accreditation for campcraft skills with the American Camping Association.

TBM planned a wilderness camping trip for training RA camp leaders. I joined the group as a part of my accreditation process. There was a dentist from Lubbock with us who was an RA leader in his church.

Four days into the trip, our portable radio reported a major tornado had hit Lubbock, Texas and wiped out hundreds of homes. We had prayer for the victims and Jerry Bob made an emergency hike to get the dentist to his car and send him home. Bob and I looked at each other, our disaster experiences were still fresh on our minds, and he said, "We better get there and see what we can do to help!"

I made phone calls to alert my wife, Dr. McLaughlin, and my boss about the situation. My wife packed food and clothes into our motor home, so that all I had to do was swing through Dallas, park my truck and drive away in our old Champion motor home.

At this point, we were reacting to the situation and planning as we went. We initially responded on the basis of our experience with the hurricane, but we quickly realized that a tornado spawned disaster was different and the response would need to be different. We were learning as we worked.

The only way I can describe the situation is to say that God had his hand on us and guided us to do the right things even when we did not know what the right thing was! We set up the wholesale- retail arrangement that Bob had used in the hurricane to distribute donated goods. The city let us use a vacant shopping mall as our headquarters and warehouse. We gave space to a childcare group, we set up a refreshment area, and other response groups joined us there. We discovered an empty housing addition and arranged with the authorities to move families in to the houses. We were able to get low interest government loans for the families. We were learning as we worked.

One lesson I learned was the truth God is bigger than any problem, rule, regulation, or jurisdictional authority, and His resources are yours for the asking.

God was doing a greater thing than any of us realized. The next step in His development of what was becoming a disaster relief ministry took place a few months later. The event was a level four hurricane that hit Corpus Christi, Texas.

Meanwhile, ministers and Baptist laymen from local churches unaffected by the tornado discovered we were on location and had been organizing help for victims. They were surprised, grateful, and eager to help.

Cameron Byler was the recreation director at first Baptist Church of Lubbock before joining the TBM staff four months earlier. He knew the city, the political leaders, the religious leaders, and the pastors of all the churches in the surrounding area. Cameron had an authoritative presence and a powerful personality. When people would ask how to help, he would give instructions and orders in such an authoritative manner everyone would say, "Yes, sir!", and immediately go to work. No one asked or suspected that this was his first disaster response.

Actually, God was so close, so real, and we were in the heart of what He wanted done...this made us respond as if we were gloves on the hands of God. We worked harder than humanly possible, we responded to needs and problems in ways that were far beyond our own experience and intelligence. We lived in prayer and claimed the promise in John 16:13, "But

when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth..." I think we talked and acted a whole lot smarter than we really were!

As I said before, God was doing a greater thing than any of us realized.

Before I write about the events of Corpus Christi hurricane, let me interject an account of how God's activity blessed our family.

Chapter 4

Lydia: An Answered Prayer

We were married seven years before our son, John, was born. When John was six years old, he announced that he wanted a baby sister. John would not let us finish a family prayer time without putting in a request for a baby sister. We kept telling him that God had not given us a daughter yet, but we would keep praying (and trying).

This continued for a year. When he was seven he looked us very solemnly after our family prayer and said, "Look, we have been at this for a year and nothing has happened. Have you thought about adoption?" How do you answer that question from a seven year old child? Where did he learn about adoption? Being parents, we had to have an adequate answer..."Son we will pray about that."

To us that was a quick easy answer, but to him that was a commitment. John included it in every prayer time and it really began to burden us as well. We began to earnestly, fervently pray for a girl. Strange things began to happen. We felt deeply convinced that God was going to send us a preschool girl. The fact became a conviction. We prayed long and we prayed specifically for a preschool girl.

This started about Christmas time in 1969, and in the early summer of 1970 we felt a deep peace about our prayer. It was the kind of peace I had experienced on other occasions when God had answered my prayer, but, although the prayer had been answered, it had not arrived yet. We were so assured we began to thank the Lord for his answer!

Our lives became intensely busy with our disaster relief activities. There was a tornado strike on Lubbock, Texas and a major hurricane strike on Corpus Christi, Texas. We were on the newly formed state Baptist disaster committee and charged with building the first mobile disaster unit in the Southern Baptist Convention. It was March of 1972 when we finally made application to the welfare agency for adoption.

The appointment for the preliminary meeting of prospective adoptive families was scheduled for mid-March. I looked around the room and was surprised by the young people in the room. Surely, they would not place a child with these kids! We considered ourselves mature but still young at 38. There were reams of papers to be filled out and individual interviews to be scheduled. Our interviews were scheduled for the last week of March, 1972.

As our appointment approached our anxiety heightened. Questions popped into mind. Since we both were experienced counselors and knew what the interrogator wanted to hear, there was the temptation to tell them what we thought would qualify us as adoptive parents. Faith and integrity conquered our temptation. We would be absolutely open and honest in every answer.

I was first in the interview room. After a brief introduction, the interviewer asked the first open ended question, "Tell me about you." I began with my family history, including my mom and dad's divorce, my step father, and my parent's remarriage and second divorce. I progressed up to my sixteenth year. Everything was fine until I said, "At sixteen I was saved."

She asked, "Saved from what?"

I answered, "I was saved from my sins, my spiritually lost condition, I was born again."

She replied, "YOU were WHAT?"

"Are you a believer?" I asked.

“Believer in what?” she asked.

“God.” I shot back.

She shrugged her shoulders, glanced at her notes and said, “No. I am an atheist. What do you mean by, born again?”

I replied, “When you realize that you have sinned against God, you feel a deep sense of regret and sorrow called repentance, and you ask Him to forgive you. He does and the Bible says that at that point you become a new creature in Christ. We describe it as being born again. Like a new born baby your life is clean and God is your Father.”

She said, “Oh, OK. What else?”

Ah, open ended question number two. I dropped the second bomb with my next statement. I never thought how it sounded to an unbeliever when I said, “When I was eighteen, I was called to preach.”

“Who called you?” she asked.

“God did.” I answered.

She looked straight into my eyes, leaned forward with raised eyebrows, and asked in a low voice, “Do you hear voices?”

“No, I do not hear voices!” I said.

“How did you get the call and how do you know it was God?” she queried.

I explained about praying for God to reveal to me my purpose in life, His will for my life, and to give me His guidance for my life. In prayer, I began to sense that my life was to be committed to ministry and the more I prayed about it, the greater peace and assurance I experienced. I also explained the encouragement that came from others who were praying for me was very helpful.

The rest of my life story had a lot of references to my faith, my religious activities, our mission work in Mexico and Belize, and my current work with youth and youth leaders.

Her question to me at the end of our interview was a little startling, “You are so religious. Do you have sex? Is that why you are trying to adopt a child?”

I could hardly contain my urge to burst out laughing as I replied, “Oh, no! When you are Christians, sex is better than ever! We know it is a gift from God, He ordained marriage, there is joy with no guilt attached, and you are totally committed to each other with no reservations. We are the birth parents of our son, but have not been physically able to have any more children.” That seemed to satisfy her curiosity.

I walked out of her office as Dr. L. walked in. I made a signal to her I would be in prayer for her. She came out one and a half hours later.

The case worker said, “I will be honest with you. You have a child who has health problems, so we could not place another one with you. This limits the pool of children available for adoption to an older couple (What! An older couple?). You have specified that you want a preschool girl. Due to the pill and abortion there are none of those available. What I am trying to say is if you are ever approved as an adoptive family, you will probably never hear from us again anyway.”

I told her that God had promised us a preschool girl and that her group was the one He would use to deliver her.

She looked straight into my eyes and said, “Maybe you did not understand. There are none available...it would take a miracle for that to happen...an absolute miracle.”

I replied, "Yes, ma'am, I understand. But you have to realize that God specializes in miracles and He is going to use you in this one. We will get a preschool girl." She rolled her eyes, shrugged her shoulders and walked away.

Why did I do this? Why did I say what I did? God had given me assurance that He would do it and it would be a shame for me to doubt Him or to hide His activity in silence.

Dr. L. asked, "Honey, what do you think?"

I replied, "Darling, I don't think she would willingly place a child with us if we were the only adoptive family on earth!"

However, in early April we received notification that we qualified as an adoptive family.

We spent the next two weeks in Mexico doing mission work with children. We had returned to Dallas and I was unlocking the door when I heard the phone ringing. I answered it and heard the voice of the case worker. She said, "Brother La Noue (what did she call me? Something had changed!), a miracle has happened!"

I interrupted with, "Yes ma'am. I told you God specializes in miracles. I know you have our preschool girl.

Don't you?" She blurted out, "You don't understand! This is a genuine, bonifide MIRACLE! Yes, we do have a girl who is almost two years old," (two years? That would be 1970, the year we felt God's answer through His peace. We started rejoicing in May of that year)."

"When is her birthday?" I asked. The reply was, May 15, 1970! Wow! How cool is that! When you walk with God in His work, you are able to experience Him in His power and see His miracles!

Our son was so excited that he had experienced God's miraculous power. He robbed his piggy bank and bought her a sandbox; he helped me clean out and decorate a room next to our bedroom for her, and helped us "childproof" the rest of the house. He told all of his friends how God had answered his prayers and witnessed to them about trusting Jesus as their savior.

She celebrated her second birthday in our home and never left until she married.

We eventually learned the details of the miracle which really were miraculous! The single mother brought her in to the welfare office and said that she and her daughter were hungry, the girl was left with others while she sought work, the families either neglected her or abused her, she had been put in a closet sometimes with bread and water and left for the day, and she had also been placed in some foster homes where she fared no better.

The mother said she wanted to put her up for adoption, but she had one major request that had to be met. She proceeded to tell of her own adoption and the abuse she suffered from her ninth year until she ran away from home at 16. She told of being in a migrant labor camp and how a church group had taken her to a vacation Bible school. She described her experience of the love, hugs, and kindness she received, the food served, and she had her own little red chair to sit in while she colored and did crafts. She said that she had never experienced anything like that in her whole life because it was her first experience with Christian people and their love. Her requirement for the adoptive family for her daughter was for them to be dedicated, active Christians.

When the supervisor read the report and the requirement, she asked, "Do any of you have a dossier on an extremely religious couple?" Our case worker held up our file and said, "I have one you will not believe!" The one thing that we thought would disqualify us as an adoptive family was the one thing that qualified us. AIN'T GOD GOOD!

The other parts of the miracle were the fact that the mother had only been in the vacation Bible school for one day and the case worker joined the Lutheran Church!

Chapter 5

Celia Gives Birth

The results of our work with the Lubbock tornado gave us a reputation among Texas Baptists as disaster responders. In a sense, we were outstanding in the field among Baptists...because there was no one else on the field! But all of this activity created recognition of a needed ministry for Baptists and put us in leadership positions because we were the only ones who had any experience with disasters and were also working in the Baptist General Convention of Texas headquarters. We were also in the same suite of offices which gave us immediate contact and constant contact with each other. This aided our “imagineering” as we bounced ideas off each other. Sometime we shouted from office to office and, at times, we would gather in the storage area with the coffee pot and do our “what ifting” and “why notting”.

With these facts in mind it was natural for the BGCT to come to us when a major hurricane was forecast to hit somewhere on the Texas coast. Since hurricane landfall prediction technology was not very well developed in 1969, we decided to prepare for a deployment, but still keep our regular schedules until we knew more.

My schedule called for me to be in a church between Harlingen and Brownsville, Texas, for a youth meeting. This is in the area of South Padre Island, a long, narrow island that was only accessible by a bridge from the mainland. During the meeting, the hurricane reports kept changing as it moved closer to land. The pastor, who was a missionary pilot, and the summer missionary, Bill Arnold (Bill was from Memphis, Tennessee and had earned his pilot’s license before he was eligible for a driver’s license), urged me to fly out to sea and look for the leading edge of storm clouds.

I had borrowed a four place aircraft, a Cessna Cardinal (C-177), from the county judge in Nacogdoches, Texas, George Middlebrook, Jr., because I wanted to be able to quickly respond to any area the hurricane might strike.

We flew over the Gulf of Mexico, due east from Harlingen, and crossing Padre Island, we noticed the beach was full of swimmers and campers. We saw the circular pattern of the clouds, I commented, “Well there it is. When I lived on Galveston Island, I saw this phenomenon just before the 1947 hurricane hit. The wind driven waves and the unusually high tide brought the sea up to the top of the twelve foot seawall...” I was interrupted by the pastor, who exclaimed, “Oh, No! All of those people on the beach at Padre Island may not know what is about to happen. We must warn them!”

We flew back to the coast and started up Padre Island from the Brownsville-Mexico border at an altitude of about twenty feet. I put down one notch of flaps and we went by the campers with the window open shouting, “Hurricane! Go! Hurricane! Go!” while waving toward the bridge. Some people signaled that they could not hear or understand. For these, we would make another pass, throttle back the engine momentarily, and shout again.

We flew up the island until we had warned all the campers, then we flew back down the island to be sure everyone was safe, because the tide and storm surge were beginning to cover the island. There was a lot of traffic at the bridge, but one fellow in a VW camper had been slow to leave his campsite. We saw the Volkswagen stalled in rising water, which had already cut off the rest of the island from the bridge. It had both front doors open and the waves were washing through it. I saw the footprints of the camper on the other side of the wash...he made the bridge.

We landed, put the aircraft in a hangar, and joined the crowd gathered in the church building, and rode out the storm. We had strong winds and rain, but the eye of the hurricane veered to the north and hit Corpus Christi, Texas.

When I was able to call Dr. McLaughlin, he gave me a report on the damage in the Corpus Christi area. Roads were blocked with downed power lines and telephone poles, homes were destroyed, but they needed a point man to make contact with the Director of Missions in the city. The point man would also survey other needs and make contact with the jurisdictional authorities to get information and to offer help.

He sent me a fax identifying me as BGCT disaster personnel and giving me authority to represent the BGCT executives in the disaster response. That letter kept me out of a lot of trouble with the Federal Aviation Administration later that day.

Bill Arnold and I flew to Corpus Christi that afternoon. We had to get permission from the Texas Department of Public Safety Emergency Operations to fly into the area. They gave us the emergency radio frequencies to use for air traffic control, since the control tower had been destroyed.

Lesson to be learned: double check the information, then double check the double checker when operating in a disaster situation. The person giving us the frequencies had an accent and what we took for 121.5 was actually 121.9.

As we approached the airport, we tried to make radio contact for permission to land. We were unable to make contact. We circled the airport and landed on a runway strewn with debris, taxied by destroyed hangars with large multi engine aircraft blown over on each other, and found an open space to park the plane.

We had hardly exited the plane when a large angry man drove up in a government car. He demanded to know which of us was pilot in command. I identified myself and the angry tirade began about unauthorized sightseers and violating temporary flight restricted air space, etc. When he paused to get a breath, I told him I was the representative from the BGCT Disaster Service, and showed him the letter. He looked stunned.

He asked, "Why didn't you contact air traffic control?"

I told him I had been calling on the tower frequency that I had been given by the DPS, 121.5.

He rolled his eyes and said, "I am sorry, nine and five sound so much alike when you are on the radio."

I gathered the needed information, made the appropriate, contacts, and got permission to establish our disaster response center at the Morgan Avenue Baptist Church. I dropped Bill in Harlingen and flew to Dallas.

I had called my wife and told her what was happening and issued instructions for putting my gear in the motor home. But, when I got to Dallas I was in for a surprise. My whole family was packed in the rig, mother-in-law and all. They said they wanted to be a part of the response. I had automatically assumed that this work was for the fellows with experience, and outdoor skills.

We arrived at the Morgan Avenue Baptist Church the next morning. I hooked up the motor home generator to the circuits that provided lights in the church basement. My wife began to do her thing (she is a fantastic organizer, administrator, and detail record keeper), my mother-in law ran a restaurant for many years and took over crew and refugee feeding in the church kitchen, and my son began to sort clothes and shoes in preparation for distribution.

Bob Dixon, Cameron Byler, and Jerry Bob Taylor worked in the field organizing distribution points for aid and directing work on various repair projects. My crew and I processed all of the volunteers and gave them assignments to Dixon's projects.

As I look back on this operation, I can see how God was giving us new experiences, teaching us to be fluid, not just flexible, putting us in situations where, like the disciple Peter, you focused on Him or you sank, and making us walk on our knees in prayer.

We were being put in the crucible, the furnace was hot, but God was about to make a new mold and pour us into it. He was making us into a new ministry that was to become one of the strongest ministries of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Southern Baptist Convention.

The spiritual sensitivity and organizing brilliance of Dr. Charles McLaughlin enabled him to see that God was doing a new thing with Baptists, and he had the courage to take all of this to the next level.

Chapter 6

A Divine Design

Dr. Charles McLaughlin, being the visionary leader that he was, debriefed us individually and as a group for the “after action” report. He was so impressed with our response and ability to organize folks in the field he made us members of a disaster relief committee. Bob Dixon suggested that every entity in the BGCT which might be involved in a response be added to the committee. Church Architecture, Evangelism, Public Relations, Women’s Missionary Union, The State Missions Commission, Texas Baptist Men, and the Texas State Youth Coordinator made up the original disaster committee.

Many of these had never had any idea of ever responding to a disaster event. As the State Youth Coordinator, I was invited for three reasons: I was one of the original responders, I was the liaison with the 23 Texas Baptist camps (excellent refugee centers), and I had designed and built three mobile clinics for the Amigos Internacionales/Rio Grande River Ministry.

The committee’s discussions were originally guided by Dr. McLaughlin and later by Dr. Eugene Greer, his executive assistant. All of the possible ministry contributions of each group were discussed. It was as if we had drilled a “gusher” in an oilfield. Our extensive prayer sessions had opened our hearts to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and He put our minds in high gear.

Bob Dixon was an extremely creative instrument in pulling all of the discussions into focus. He said that the disaster responses of other groups were all similar, everyone trying to meet all of the victims needs. He compared it to driving on a trip, the gas gauge nears empty and there is no gas station in sight. Just as you are about to panic, you come to a highway intersection and there are gas stations on every corner, all offering identical services. Bob suggested that we focus on one particular response service and make whatever other services we provided as ancillary to that ministry.

Bob said, “As Baptists we are good at two things; worshiping and eating. Since we have trained so many of our Baptist men who work with boys and camping, we have a great pool of outdoor cooks who can camp while they work. Let’s major on the provision of hot meals to the victims and the disaster response workers, then we can let our people branch out to meet other needs as they surface and we are able to provide manpower.” Dixon continued, “We need some type of mobile unit containing all of the things each of your groups would like to find on site when you respond. This would provide an event ready box with your supplies delivered to the disaster. We need some type of mobile disaster unit.”

He turned to me and asked, “Johnny, you have done mobile clinics, will you design a unit for us?” I raised my left hand with the index finger extended (Bob played catcher for the Washington Senators farm team and was accustomed to hand signals) signaling “standby one (minute)”.

I was so overwhelmed I could not speak. I sensed the job assignment was God sized, not Johnny sized! All I could do was bow my head and pray, “Father, am I to accept this or pass it on? Is this for me to do?” Immediately, God answered with a Divine, “Uh Huh.” I said, “Yes, would everyone make a list of what they want the unit to do and what it should contain for their group?”

I asked how long I had before the plan was due and they replied, "Two weeks." I had two immediate thoughts, "John, don't panic." And, "God, this ball is definitely in your court!" I simply replied, calmly, "OK."

After collecting the six lists, I went to my office and called a friend of mine who owned Hix Engineering Company. I explained the project, read him the lists, and asked how long would it take his company to design such a unit? He was silent for a while, then replied, "If I pulled every one of my people off the other projects and put them on this, it would take about six weeks."

I commented, "Mr. Hix, I only have two weeks."

He laughed and said, "I hope you are a man of prayer!"

And pray, I did!

For two weeks, every day was a day of prayer! I would kneel and pray with my pad of quadrille drawing paper before me for hours every evening. I would read through the lists and pray for a way to package them. My prayer questions were: what kind of vehicle, if a trailer, what size, if a truck or bus, what size, what kind? I drew a blank every night. Nothing materialized.

The fourteenth day was Sunday. I went to the Glen Rose Baptist camp for a youth meeting. As I left the camp, I prayed, "Father, this is the last day to prepare the plans that are due tomorrow. You told me to accept the assignment, what do I do now?" I was suddenly filled with a peaceful assurance that all was well. HE was on the job and all I had to do was be still and watch Him work in a way that would prove that it was His work and not mine or any man's.

I raced home in my VW bug...well, maybe "raced" is a little bit of exaggeration in a 40 horsepower VW, but I did keep the accelerator on the floor. I dashed into the house at 12:30 am on Monday morning, the day the plans were due at 9:00 am. I grabbed my drafting instruments, dashed to the kitchen table, pinned a sheet of drafting paper on my drawing board, racked up a T-square, picked up a pencil, and prayed, "Lord I am in your hands, it is up to you alone. There is no way that I can take credit for any of this. I am simply your instrument. I await your direction."

He stepped in with His power!

I began to see a vision of a dropped frame moving van forming in my mind. How big are they? I used a divinely guided guess. When the plan was finished, I measured one and discovered I was guessing six inches narrower and one foot shorter than the actual trailer. That is pretty close for a Baptist preacher at one o'clock in the morning!

My pencil flew across the paper again and again as I drew a scale of ½ inch per foot, first the floor plan, the elevation of the right and left exterior walls, then the right and left elevations of the interior walls, and finally the elevation of the rear wall/door. At 6:30 am, my wife came to the kitchen and asked, "Are you coming to bed?" I replied, "No, Honey, just fix my breakfast. I can't quit now!"

I finished the plans, rolled them up, and headed for the office. I pinned the plans on the conference room wall and waited for the committee to meet. I expected to have some criticism from the groups and suggestions for changes, so I was prepared to take notes...but I had underestimated the Father!

For two and a half hours I explained the plans and answered questions. The plans were examined from all angles. Finally, the group fell silent, and suddenly broke into applause. Not

one change was suggested! I was shocked! I had been in Baptist committees where there was unanimous agreement, but never in a committee that broke out in applause!

Dr. McLaughlin, smiled, stood up and said, "This is a wonderful plan and we are grateful for all the time you have taken to give us these detailed plans (I did not have the heart to tell them that they had been done in six hours!)." Then he popped the big question, "John, would you build it for us?" With the left hand up again, I bowed my head and prayed "GOD?" and I received another divine, "Uh Huh." I said, "Yes, sir, if you provide the money?"

I arrived at home that night, exhausted. I had not been to bed in 36 hours. But, something was not right, God would not give me release, there was a hidden problem somewhere. I could not sleep. I crawled out of bed and spread the plans on the table. Suddenly, I saw it! I had considered the needed sections and the needed equipment, but, I had not considered the roadway on which it would travel. All roads are made with a slight turtleback cross section to disperse water. This fact meant that the rig would have a tendency to tilt slightly to the right in transit. To offset this and prevent the tendency to capsize in left turns, the heavier equipment needed to be on the left side. I had drawn the heavy stuff on the right side.

The next morning, after the sun was up, I taped the plans to a window backward and used tracing paper to realign the heavy side on the left...no problem!

Chapter 7

The Divine Design Under Construction

Building the first mobile disaster unit was another adventure in watching God at work! The committee approved my plans and my selection as the builder, and then they all went back to their regular work considering the committee's work done. I was left with an enormous project and two promises. Miss Eula Mae Henderson, director of the Women's Missionary Union, promised \$26,000 for the construction, and Bob Dixon said TBM would help when I started construction.

The construction plan had item number one, find a trailer! Dr. Greer and I visited every used trailer sales company in Dallas and could not find one we could agree on. I started calling moving companies asking if they had a drop frame moving van in their surplus vehicle inventory. I located one in San Antonio, Texas. It was a Dorsey electronics trailer that was 45 feet long, with cargo pods suspended beneath the frame.

I must insert another "God thing" at this point. Two years before this project I felt the need to enable Amigos Internacionales to be of greater assistance to the River Ministry. There were so many requests to transport donated goods and building materials to the Rio Grande River Valley I knew an 18 wheel tractor trailer unit was needed. I started praying for one.

One Sunday in my Sunday School Class at First Baptist Church of Dallas, a member mentioned that he was an attorney for the Sears Roebuck Corporation. After class I ask him about the disposal process for their surplus freight tractors. He explained the bidding process and told me where they were parked in the warehouse area. When I explained the need, he gave me a name and phone number to call.

I saw 14 or 15 tractors on the lot. I inspected each one. They all were practically identical. I prayed, "Lord, which one of these is the best. What should I ask or look for to find the best one?" I immediately noticed that all of them had a broken window or a cracked windshield except one. I bid \$750 on that one. That was a bold step of faith because I did not have a dime to cover the bid, but I felt God's assurance that I was on the right track.

The next Friday I was notified that I was high bidder on that particular tractor and was instructed where to bring a check and pick it up. I prayed for funding all day Saturday.

In class Sunday morning, I asked the attorney, "How do you borrow money on something you do not own yet so you can pay for it?"

He asked, "John, did you bid on that tractor without having any money to pay for it?"

I confessed, "Yes, sir, I did...in faith...I know it is what God wanted me to do."

He looked at me in silence for a few seconds, pulled out his check book, began to write a check for the money, and said, "I have not done anything special for the Lord's service lately, so I will cover this. By the way, the tractor is of no use unless you have a freight trailer. Go back to the lot and bid on one and I will cover that cost also." Amigos used that rig for six years before any repairs were necessary.

It was that tractor which I took to San Antonio to pick up the trailer for the disaster unit.

I planned my trip carefully in order to arrive back in Dallas before daylight and miss the heavy traffic. When I arrived in San Antonio, I knew I was doing God's will and that it was a very important step of ministry I was taking because Satan attacked in full force!

I paid the company for the trailer; they closed for the day and all of the employees left before I could get connected to the trailer. J. Edwin Nusko, one of the three original trustees of Amigos and first vice president of the First National Bank of Athens, Texas was the only one who had tractor trailer experience. He was the Amigos driver that had done all of the logistics for our freight transport. He was the only one who had ever driven it as an 18 wheeler. I helped him hook up several times, but I had never driven it. I had a commercial driver's license, but had only driven wreckers and single axle freight trucks. This was my main reason for trying to get back to Dallas before daylight.

I backed under the trailer and heard a loud thump. Satisfied that I had captured the king pin in the fifth wheel lock, I stepped down to find the king pin had gone over the fifth wheel and was stuck ahead of it. As I cranked the landing gear higher, so I could pull out from under the pin, the landing gear stripped out and collapsed, dropping the trailer on the truck frame.

When you are in trouble, it is amazing how quickly and easily sincere prayer is offered to God! I was praying for God's help and wisdom. Later, I added a request that He would get Satan off my back, shut Satan's slandering mouth, and send him back to the abyss. That was prayed through gritted teeth as I had a spiritual temper tantrum (that term is not found in systematic theology, but several times I noticed a Psalmist had written a Psalm while having one. It is OK to have one as long as you and God are on the same side of the problem, but when the problem comes between you and God, then, you are on Satan's side. That is not good!).

The only tool I had to raise the trailer high enough to clear the fifth wheel was a small hydraulic jack. I worked until 2:00 a.m. before I got everything connected correctly. I drove to Dallas in six hours and arrived in the middle of the morning rush hour traffic. All lanes were full and it was bumper to bumper traffic. I prayed a lot!

I was taking the rig to my home in East Dallas, actually in Mesquite. The homes have rear entry garages which are accessed from an alley. I had to back the trailer down the alley for 100 yards. The alley was only 12 feet wide. I really prayed a lot!

The most difficult job was putting the trailer into my two car driveway. It was so close I had to move the rear of the trailer six feet to the right without moving the tractor for me to back it into the driveway. I used the little jack and bricks to do the job.

I placed half of the jack base on the edge of a brick in the center of the rear axle, raise it as high as it would go, then put my shoulder against the left rear bulkhead and shove hard. The jack would tilt, the brick would crush and the rear axle would move 12 inches sideways. Six bricks and six feet later I was able to finish backing it into place, disconnect the tractor and drive away. God answers prayer!

The next day my wife was asked by our new neighbor across the alley, if the trailer was there when we built our house. She said, "No, my husband backed it in there yesterday. He replied, "Ma'am, I own a truck line and I want to hire him right now!"

Sometime obedience to the Father makes you look a lot better than you really are. God really does answer prayer. He answers prayer about the small stuff as well as the big stuff.

After school the next day, my nine year old son pulled me aside and said, "Dad, I want you to give me a list of things to pray for because I want to have a part in this project. I have heard you talk about building the mobile clinics and how God answered your prayer for what you needed. I want to have God answer my prayer that way so I can tell people how good God is and how He works." I hugged him and told him that this would be a joint project of prayer for the two of us. Little did I know what an important part he would play a little later and how much these answered prayers would influence the rest of his life!

The construction began! Wow! What a start!

The construction phase required making my two-car garage a workshop with power tools, equipment storage, and building a eight foot portable tool rack, with fastener storage on the bottom and a peg board upper section for tool storage. My den became a dormitory and my kitchen a café.

The prayer base was quickly established. Bob Dixon put out a prayer request through Texas Baptist Men. Eula Mae Henderson did the same thing through The Women's Missionary Union (WMU). It was the State Missions Offering, promoted and distributed by the WMU that provided the \$ 26,000.00 to build the first mobile disaster unit.

The WMU prayed and paid for the project. TBM prayed and played a major role in providing workers to build the unit. Our family made the unit and its needs our prayer focus for the entire construction time. My family was the prayer group that majored on the daily needs. For instance: How many workers do we need tomorrow? What projects will we try to complete tomorrow? What supplies will be needed? Where can we obtain the equipment that we cannot afford?

They covered the details that were constantly emerging as each evening we reviewed the plans, the progress, the problems, and put them into a prayer list. My nine year old son took a copy of the list with him everywhere he went. When he prayed, it sounded like he was ordering from a catalog and was expecting a rushed delivery! His prayers reminded me of Dr. Kerfoot Walker's prayers in the development of the first mobile clinic. His prayer was short, precise, bold, and made with such confidence in the Word of God that I was frequently moved to tears.

My wife became the procurement officer. I gave her an equipment and supply list each day and she would begin her "search and obtain" operation. She has a tremendous gift for shopping! Her father was a shrewd businessman who taught her to, "always pay cash and always buy wholesale".

One example of her expertise was finding and purchasing a 25 KW generator. She found the unit at a used equipment lot in Dallas. This was done with a telephone and the yellow pages book. The initial price was \$4,000.00, but before the call was over she had bargained the owner down to \$2,500.00.

When I went to pick it up, the owner said, "That will be \$4,500.00."

I replied, "No, sir. My wife called you and you agreed to \$2,500.00".

"That woman was your wife? I don't know how she did this to me! I paid \$2,500.00 for it when I bought it!" he stammered!

I told him that this was for a church project and that God had probably moved him to do it.

He said, "Is He in on this too? Oh, well just give me a check and take it for \$2,500.00!"

The construction was a series of minor and major miracles. Everything we did was bathed in prayer. Converting a 45 foot Dorsey moving van (electronics van) into a mobile disaster unit that would house the equipment, supplies, office space, and crew quarters was not the usual construction project by any means.

How do you insulate it without building interior walls and losing needed space? I had never heard of radiant barrier insulation, but I prayed for direction and it came. I glued aluminum foil on the back of 3/16 paneling and screwed it to the walls. The effect of that reflective insulation was phenomenal.

This type of paneling could not be screwed to the ceiling without making holes in the trailer roof. This called for the construction of an interior ceiling which could hold paneling and

serve as the stabilizing structure for the cabinets that would line the interior walls. How strong should it be? How far beneath the roof should it be located? Many questions popped into my mind. I prayed. God answered.

A framework of 2X4 boards covered with ¼ inch exterior plywood was built. It was attached to the walls six inches below the roof. This structure was glued and screwed together like a section of aircraft fuselage. It was a strong structure to which the interior cabinets could be attached. I thought that we had actually “over engineered and over built” the ceiling...but God knew the future and we did not.

In 1974, the unit was sent to Honduras for Hurricane FiFi. The driver ran into a low bridge in Mexico City and sheared 12 feet of the roof off, but when we opened the doors, we discovered no damage had been done to the interior. The ceiling was undamaged and all cabinets were still stable. Three inches of the upper walls and twelve feet of the roof were wadded up in a massive steel accordion, and the interior ceiling was untouched! The bridge's lower girders had sheared off the top at the middle of the separation between the roof and the ceiling. The stiffness of the “screwed and glued” ceiling had held the side walls rigidly while the top was being sheared away, leaving the ceiling undisturbed.

The propane gas system was another “act of God”. A chassis mounted propane tank was necessary to keep the gas from being stored in a closed trailer (a leak inside the trailer would have made the unit a bomb with the first spark). Because of the trailer's dimensions and limited road clearance, I had to have a tank with special dimensions to hold the necessary amount of propane.

My wife had called every propane company in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area to no avail. No such tank existed. I called a tank manufacturing company and ask if such a tank was made in Texas. The answer was, “No, but we might be able to make one.” I jumped in my truck with the drawings and made dash for the company before someone changed their minds.

The company had a piece of pipe the right diameter with very thick walls. They used it for the sides of the tank.

The reason I called it an “act of God” occurred two years later. I was driving the rig off of a barge in Honduras and the dock was four feet lower than the barge deck. We had stacked thick boards on the dock to make a ramp, but the unloading was complicated by the waves in the harbor. The wind was making four to five foot swells which pounded the dock. The bow of the barge was bouncing up and down. It would rise five feet above the makeshift ramp and then drop below the ramp before rising again. I was trying to time the rise and fall so I could jump the tractor off on the ramp, pause and wait for the proper time to drag the trailer off the barge on to the ramp. The tractor axles were 14 feet apart, from front to rear, but it was 45 feet to the trailer's rear axles. I got the tractor off safely, but the time was too short on the next wave to get the trailer completely off. As the barge rose on the swell, everybody started yelling, “Run! It is going to blow up!

While everyone was diving for cover, I was sitting in the truck cab with one foot on the air brakes and one foot on the clutch pedal holding the rig steady: wondering what is about to blow up behind me? At the same time, I was trying to gauge the right time to jerk the rest of the trailer off the barge. The barge's bow began to lower and I pulled it completely free of the descending deck. Everyone came out of their cover as I drove off the dock. They told me what had happened. My first lurch from the deck to the board ramp left the propane tank poised over the bow. When the bow rose on the next wave, it struck the middle of the tank, continued rising

until the rear axles of the trailer were suspended three feet in the air. The entire weight of the trailer and its load were supported by the loaded propane tank alone.

Thank God for His wisdom and guidance in the construction. He guided us to the right company that could create the right tank to solve a problem we had never imagined. He had helped us when we stumbled, to fall upstairs instead of down.

The work on the rig's construction was witnessed by a parade of visitors. Some were my patient neighbors, some were Baptists who were thrilled that something was being done to minister to disaster victims, and some were people whom God moved to help support the project.

One visitor was a computer programmer who was eager to help us create databases for trained volunteers, skilled people, and resources. One was a partner in Watson Electric Company. He donated all of the electrical supplies, all of the tools for the onboard repair shop, the tool storage boxes, and the storm suits and rain gear for the entire crew. People like this saved the project thousands of dollars.

The donated labor was another blessing. We worked 90 hours each week for six weeks to build the unit. My mother-in-law, Elizabeth "Becky" Baldwin, who lived with us for ten years, had owned a restaurant in Illinois. She fed the crews everyday with meals and snacks. My son would work after school picking up scattered tools, screws, bolts, return them to their place on the tool rack, and sweep the area. He would do his homework and join us for our prayer time.

John II's familiarity with the unit and its components were to be a surprise blessing in days to come.

When the unit's construction was almost completed, the first call to service came. There had been torrential rains in the Guadalupe River area of Texas' hill country. A 35 foot wall of water came down the river canyon destroying everything on the river's course, up to 35 feet above the river bed. There were houses, mobile homes, autos, and debris rolling down the river.

Bob Dixon heard the news and called the conference center where Cameron Byler and I were explaining the new disaster program to a group of church recreators. Cameron had just said, "If a disaster strikes, someone could step in that door, tell us we had a call and we would be gone. We would have to drop everything and respond."

At that moment, the camp manager stepped through the door and said, "I hate to interrupt, but I have an emergency call for Cameron Byler or John La Noue!" The recreators thought we had staged the scene, but they knew it was real when they saw the tailgates of our pickup trucks headed out of camp.

Bob called and asked, "Is the unit ready to roll?"

I replied, "Yes, sir! It is ready to roll!"

It was technically ready to roll, but it was not complete. I did not think it was proper to burden Bob with unnecessary details!

Everything was in place and bolted down. On the tractor was mounted the large generator, in the front of the trailer there was a 1,000 gallon water tank and pump, then came the crew kitchen, ice maker, communications office, and the public relations office. In the central area there was the food storage, refrigeration, cooking equipment, toilet and shower for the crew, and the air conditioning unit. The rear area of the trailer held the triple decked bunks for the crew, the first aid area, and it doubled as a conference area during the day. A flat bottomed boat and the telescoping radio antenna were suspended from the ceiling. On the curb side of the trailer, I had built a foldout work bench with a vise and tool storage area for repairing equipment. It was concealed behind an unused entry door.

Everything was in place, but nothing had been tested. There were no automatic controls in place. The voltage regulator and the water pressure were manually adjustable, but not automatic. There would need to be someone monitoring all of this, someone who knew the systems. Bob told us to drive the unit to Seguin, Texas, and set it up in the courthouse parking lot.

Chapter 8

Seguin: Disaster Relief Unit's First Disaster

I began to pack my bag for the trip and discussing the control problems with Dr. L. Our son overheard me and volunteered, "Dad, I know the systems and the controls. If you will mark the gauges where you want the indicators to be, I can handle it."

I put on my new disaster uniform and he put on his Royal Ambassador uniform. We climbed into the tractor cab together and started our father and son ministry project.

John was only nine years old, but had already won the last two science fairs with his study of the sympathetic and para-sympathetic nerve systems: and his study of producing antibiotics from soil. Why not give him this opportunity?

When we were established on site, I put a chair in the place where the controls were. He stayed in that chair eight hours each day keeping the gauges in the "green," and he washed tables at night.

As we drove up to the courthouse, several things made an indelible impression on me. The first was the shocked look on the faces of the city officials of Seguin, who had given us permission to park our feeding unit in front of City Hall. When they stepped through the building's front door and saw an eighteen wheeler mobile kitchen parked in the street and our large kitchen canopy tied to the parking meters, they looked stunned! They were thinking of a unit the size of Salvation Army canteen or an American Red Cross food serving truck...but here was a semi tractor-trailer unit that took up all of the parking space in front of the building!

The second impression was made by one of our "customers". A man was eating a bowl of our stew and reading the signs on the side of our unit. He read out loud, "Texas Baptist Disaster Unit". Then he commented, "I did not know Baptists did things like this. I just thought they held revivals and tried to make their churches bigger. I did not know that they really cared about people."

Oh, that hurt! Our mindset had been that we were telling our community we loved them when we held a revival. After all, we put out big signs that said, "REVIVAL! Everybody is Welcome!" Yet, we had so often neglected the first element of Jesus' ministry, that of meeting human need where He found it, but we heavily emphasized the second element of His ministry... introducing people to God: evangelism. This actually made our ministry efforts appear out of balance to others.

The third impression I brought home was the realization that my son had become a nine year old man. For ten days, he did full time ministry work, regulating water pressure, adjusting the voltage from our ancient generator, cleaning tables, collecting and compacting garbage, filling ice chests, and telling our volunteers where everything was located.

Confirmation of his passage into manhood occurred on the trip home

Cameron Byler, Bob Dixon, Jerry Bob Taylor, John II and I stopped in Waco, Texas for lunch. We had not had a "sit down meal" where we could relax and eat in ten days. We went into Heitmiller's Steak House, grabbed menus, and started unwinding emotionally from the event. Everyone ordered the biggest steak on the menu and loaded baked potatoes. I knew my son's favorite meal was a hamburger and French fried potatoes, but, as I gave his order, he said, "Dad, can I have a steak instead?"

I said, "Of course, son. The only pay you ever get from Texas Baptist Men is good food. Which steak do you want?"

He held up his hands about as far apart as his shoulders and said, "One that big!"

He ate every scrap of it!

From hamburgers to Heitmiller's sirloin! My son had moved from boyhood to manhood! These activities and other mission projects in which he was involved as a child and as a youth help set his course in life. He has shared in the writing of other chapters in this book. But, for now it will be sufficient for you to know that his journey of life took him to Baylor University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, University of Texas for premed, Texas A&M University Medical School, Parkland Hospital in Dallas for his surgical residency, Southwestern Medical School faculty to teach Trauma Surgery, Cincinnati Children's Hospital for a Pediatric Surgery Fellowship, he is now serving as a pediatric surgeon for nine hospitals in the Dallas area and is doing missionary medical trips to the Sudan and other countries (Iran, North Korea, Zimbabwe).

By the way, that was a great steak!

The success of the Sequin operation was wonderful, but we had a lot to learn.

We modified our kitchen equipment and kitchen operation to use a varied selection of food types. Milton Schmidt, a kitchen chemist, worked up a set of recipes and trained cooking teams.

Other state Baptist Conventions heard about the Texas disaster relief program. The idea and concept began to build momentum. The program struck a chord with Baptists who had always wanted to help people in major disaster events, but did not know where to start. Many had responded through other organizations, but now they began to dream of having their own Baptist organization. The Lord was creating a tremendous ministry for Southern Baptist that has grown to such an extent that it is now the third largest disaster response organization in America.

As the concept spread, some groups would send me their unit plans and ask for my advice. I learned one thing very quickly: creative minds do not think alike! The second thing I learned was more important: when God is in charge of a project or movement, He may lead people to see the same thing from different perspectives and help them develop a different approach to the same problem. Do not criticize them; trust their walk with God to lead them in the direction He desires.

Being on the ground floor of a new ministry has its dangers...since you were first with the idea; you have a tendency to think you have more wisdom and answers than those who join the movement later. If you have been walking on your knees in prayer throughout the development of the project, and people have begun to refer to you as the expert, you can very easily develop spiritual arrogance..."if people do not do things like you, then they are not following God!"

I realized this after several months of reviewing plans, modifying plans, and writing critiques on the plans that other Baptist groups sent to me. They did very little if any of my suggestions. Yet, everyone developed a unit, or units, that met their needs and did the job required. Their mobile disaster units were made to function in a manner that fit their different styles of operation. This was proven to me in our response to the Mexico City earthquake disaster. The Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and the Oklahoma tractor trailer units were involved. No two of them were alike, but every one of them did the job of feeding thousands of refugees every day for a month.

Lt. Col. Jim Furgerson, a retired marine fighter pilot and Viet Nam veteran developed the "Disaster Relief Roundtable". This was a meeting where all of the state disaster directors sat at tables arranged in a huge circle and their staffs sat behind them. The objective was for each group to tell about the disaster events to which they had responded, explain their response to it, and report on problems and lessons learned. It was a time for displaying new equipment and brainstorming problems, as well as possible ministries.

One day I complimented Jim on the idea for the conference and the tremendous impact it was having on the entire ministry of disaster relief. His reply was, "John, great generals are not made in battle, they are made at the conference table." God had gifted Jim with a faith forged in the heat of combat and the ability to think under pressure. His military background made him an excellent tactician in using men and machines. He was fantastic at developing strategy based on past problems, their solutions, and expected challenges.

He was a God sent leader who never failed to give God the glory!

He gave me a greater understanding of how important each worker was individually as well as a part of the team, to respect the ideas of the new, less experienced workers, and to appreciate the fact that God was always in control. Frequently, God would send us answers to our problems that we could not receive because our experience and our leadership positions made us feel like we were better at the job than the new worker bringing us a suggestion.

Lesson learned: Humility is priceless!

Chapter 9

Fertilizing and Pruning for Spiritual Growth

Twenty months after the mobile unit was completed I was still the chief maintenance worker and driver for the group. I love ministering to people and my official position as State Youth Coordinator. It was a demanding and fascinating job. I traveled all over Texas working with associational youth groups, helping them start Christian Youth Action groups, starting high school prayer groups, locating college students to serve in small churches for the summer, and a host of other ministries.

However, I grew up working in auto mechanic shops, foundry, and machine shops. I love mechanical work. I have always done all of my own vehicle maintenance. Having the assignment to work on the mobile unit was a welcome break for me. It was therapy!

In addition, I knew every bolt, screw, wire, and pipe in the entire rig. I had helped rebuild the tractor engine the day I bought it. Therefore, I was a natural for the job.

I made every trip the unit made for twenty months. I really felt indispensable to the work.

In the midst of all this, I received an invitation to take a position in the Church Recreation Department of the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tennessee. Because of my work with the twenty-three Texas Baptist Camps and my outdoorsman's skills, they thought I was qualified.

I could not accept the position.

After all, I was indispensable to the disaster relief program.

When the laymen who had taken over the Amigos Internacionales organization heard about this, they said, "You don't want to go to Nashville. You need to stay here and head up Amigos. We are all volunteers and we need someone full time to run the program and be a fund raiser."

I could not accept the offer.

After all, I was indispensable to the disaster relief program.

There were other reasons why we felt Nashville was totally out of the question. Our son was terribly susceptible to plant allergens and Nashville was known as "allergy alley". He had been sick so much and near death several times, so, we had great fear of a move to Nashville.

We were compelled to pray about both positions just to be sure we were not aborting God's plan for us. But, surely He would not move us.

After all, I was indispensable to the disaster relief program.

My prayer was not so much the positive prayer of an open mind to receive God's direction, as it was a negative prayer with a disclaimer attached. For instance, "Father, with the delicate health of my son and Nashville's terrible allergens, you would not ask us to go there. Would You?

After all, I am indispensable to the disaster program here."

This is where God stepped in with grace, humor, and humiliating circumstances.

The revelation of God's will for us began on Thanksgiving Day, 1972. We had invited a recently widowed friend to join us for lunch. He was James Krafft, M.D. my son's pediatrician and a member of the Amigos Internacionales, Inc. volunteer physicians group.

After lunch, he said, "I need to go home a little early. Let me call a taxi because I do not want to interfere with your enjoying this family time." We told him that we would not let him do that because we wanted to have the privilege of his fellowship on the trip to his house. After we left our house, he told us of a special meeting that he wanted to attend at an Episcopal church near his home. He asked us to drop him off there.

"What is going on there?" we asked. He told us of a prayer and praise meeting that was to be held shortly. I was curious as to why this Baptist doctor was going to a meeting at an Episcopal church. I knew he was a Baptist deacon, but what was he seeking at a church that was known for its high church ritualism...after all I was a Baptist because "we were the nearest thing to a New Testament church".

My spiritual snobbery was in for a lesson in humility that day.

We insisted that we stay with him and take him home afterward, He shrugged his shoulders and said, "Alright, I appreciate the ride...but, this meeting will be a little different than that to which you are accustomed!"

The fellowship hall or multi-purpose room was filled with people sitting in concentric circles of chairs. In the small inner circle, the Rector of the church was playing a guitar and leading the group in singing. I was immediately aware of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. I was surprised (after all, this was an Episcopal church)!

What happened after that taught me a powerful lesson about how and with whom God works.

One lesson I learned was to never look down on other people's walk with God. Trust their spiritual experience to be authentic, even though it is not like mine. The proof of their experience's validity is the fruit borne and evidence of a life lived which is consistent with the Scripture.

Occasionally, the rector would pause and ask for anyone to speak who had a prayer request or a testimony of praise they wished to share. One person would stand and share a difficult situation, problem, or perhaps a doubt. Someone else would stand and say something like, "I want to pray for them because I had a similar problem and God helped me to find a solution." The person would pray for the other person and lead us in prayer for them. I sensed great power in these deeply sympathetic prayers. I was surprised (after all, this was an Episcopal church)!

Someone else might rise and say, "I want to praise the Lord God for the prayer He answered this week." When their testimony was finished, someone else would stand and say something like, "I am so thrilled to see how God has worked in your life. Permit me to offer a prayer of praise to God in your behalf!" They would lead us in a passionate prayer of praise to God. Their evident joy over their brother or sister could not have been surpassed if they had been the personal recipient of the answered prayer. The spiritual power that God had placed in this fellowship, because of their unity was astounding (after all this was an Episcopal church)!

I realized that I was seeing the church functioning as a body. For example, when you mash your finger with a hammer, your other hand grabs it, your muscles automatically flex, and making you recoil from the pain, your brain sets off an alarm, and your mouth yells, "Ow!" The whole body reacts to pain or danger. When one of our fellow church members is in emotional, spiritual, or physical pain, should not the church body respond with a grace filled reflex of sympathy and support? Likewise, when one in our fellowship is blessed with a spiritual breakthrough, a physical or emotional blessing, should not this be a cause for all of the fellowship to rejoice?

What a lesson!

The warmth, sincerity, and love I felt in this group was amazing (after all, this was an Episcopal church)! My denominational pride was being beaten to death! I asked myself how often I had seen this kind of “body life” in my own church and was embarrassed by my answer.

The Lord was not through with His lesson.

I previously stated that our main reason for not going to The Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville was our fear for our son’s health...and that I felt indispensable to the disaster relief program. Then God shook my theological foundations!

In King James Biblical language, I would have to say, “It happened on this wise...”

We sang more praise songs, rejoiced in prayer, and a man stood up, stopping the singing, and said, “I have received a word from God for someone here today.” I thought, “Oh, no, the meeting is going charismatic and this Baptist is ready to leave!”

He said, “God has told me to say that you have no need to be fearful. Be obedient, come and follow Me, my children. I will take care of you, if you come and follow Me. Have no fear for I will be with you.”

I knew immediately that the message was for us. I tried to touch my wife with my elbow and bumped her elbow on its way to me! “That was for us!” She whispered. I agreed.

A man had just prophesied, the message was undeniably for us, we had been in the incredibly powerful presence of the Holy Spirit that had brought all of us together with a tremendous sense of unity. I was seeing God at work in a surprising way (after all, this was in an Episcopal church). My systematic theology was becoming extremely unsystematic at this point!

God was not through.

That evening a friend called from College Station, Texas. He was another physician who worked with us in the Amigos Internacionales, Inc. clinic ministry. Dr. Lamar McNew said, “John, my wife and I are very concerned about the decision you have to make. We really want you to work with us in Amigos, but we know you have to pray through this to determine God’s will. Could we drive to Dallas tomorrow and spend some time in prayer with you? We would like to stay in prayer until God gives you an answer.” We were thrilled to have this offer of prayer support from such a spiritual couple.

They arrived the next afternoon and said, “John you do not want to go to Nashville do you?”

I replied, “No, I want to stay here where my son has good medical help and I can still be involved in the disaster relief project. John Jr’s serum has been balanced for this area’s allergens and he is doing well. We are afraid that a move to the “allergy alley” that Nashville is could be detrimental to his health. Even if I go with Amigos, I can still live here and serve on the disaster unit.”

Dr. McNew said, “Alright let’s go to prayer and get this settled. You want to stay here; we want you to stay here. Surely God does too. So we will pray until you receive assurance that this is right.”

Our prayer meeting started about 2:30 pm and almost two hours later we were still on our knees in the den. Lamar’s wife began to weep. She began to weep uncontrollably, sobbing deeply. Suddenly she said, “I have never had this happen before, but God has given me a message for you. He said, “You have no need to be fearful. Be obedient, come and follow Me, my children. I will take care of you, if you come and follow Me. Have no fear for I will be with you.” Dr. L and I were stunned! The exact message came from two people who were 200 miles apart yesterday. I was so shaken that I did not tell them what had happened the day before.

I suggested that we all write on a piece of paper what we sensed the will of God to be for us. All four ballots said, "Nashville". It was at this point I shared the events of the day before. We were all amazed! A covering of peace settled over us like a warm blanket. We knew the will of God in this matter, truly, not our will but His.

The first lesson I learned from this was simple but profound. When you are in doubt about God's direction for your life, pray and wait. He will make it clear if you continue to look for His face in prayer, patiently, and not be hurried into a decision by someone else's time table.

The second lesson I learned was that when the Father communicates with you, you will know it is Him and His message will be clear.

I called Ray Conner, the director of the Church Recreation Department at the Baptist Sunday School Board (BSSB) and told him that we felt it was God's will that we join him. He was delighted and we were relieved. The days of doubting were over and a new adventure was beginning.

To our surprise, the BSSB suggested that we stay in Dallas for awhile. Their plan for the Church Recreation Department included the development of program materials for day camps, resident camps, wilderness camping, family camping, and materials for the managers of resident camps and conference centers.

Texas had twenty-three resident camps, many churches had church recreators, or activity directors on their staff, and the churches frequently used recreation techniques in their mission work. This made The Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) and its constituents a great place for research and for future marketing of outdoor education materials.

Eventually, the orders came to move to the Nashville, Tennessee, facilities of the Baptist Sunday School Board. By this time our whole family was excited about the move.

We put our house in Mesquite (east section of Dallas County) on the market, stored our furniture, packed our motor home, and headed for Nashville. Our family was accustomed to living in the motor home because I frequently took them with me on my work and research assignments.

I missed the BGCT disaster relief ministry very much. I missed the robust fellowship of Bob Dixon, Jerry Bob Taylor, and Cameron Byler. When we were together, we brought out the best in each other. It was as if God gave each of us a piece of whatever puzzle we were solving. As we worked out the problem, each man contributed what God had given him, and, suddenly the solution would appear. The blessing was that we were all as grateful for each other's contribution as we were our own.

Another lesson I learned concerned my indispensability to the disaster unit.

I was not.

When I left, the job of maintenance and modification was filled by Jerry Bob. I did not know that he grew up in his father's auto repair shop in Brownwood, Texas. He also worked many hours in the unit's construction and knew it inside and out. He was perfect!

If God moves you to a new ministry, and it is His will that the old ministry continue, trust Him to provide for the staff you are leaving. I have discovered that those whom God sends to pick up the work I leave usually take the ministry far beyond my initial vision.

The new work in Nashville was a dream job! Teaching camping, mountaineering, the use of outdoor education and recreation in mission work, and developing printed materials. I loved it! I told my wife that I enjoyed being in an office writing for a few weeks; then being out in the wilderness acting like Tarzan for a few weeks. But, I would hear of floods, tornados, and other

natural disasters. My heart would break with the desire to be there and help...and then, it happened!

Chapter 10

Hurricane FiFi Honduras

The radio and television newscasts were filled with the tragedy of a hurricane, Hurricane FiFi striking the Central American country of Honduras. My heart was so heavy with the desire to help I was almost grieving. I prayed, “God, I know the work I am doing is important, but this is an event for which I feel uniquely prepared. If TBM responds, please work a miracle and let me be with them.”

In the middle of a day camp conference, in East Tennessee, I received a call from my boss, Ray Conner. He said the TBM office in Texas had called the president of the BSSB and asked for permission to contact me about joining them for the Honduras Disaster Project. I was so excited that I wanted to run through the camp shouting, “Hallelujah!” But, I knew there was one more hurdle to clear. Would the BSSB be willing to let me go out of the country for a month?

The BSSB administrators thought it would be a good way to demonstrate its support for the Foreign Mission Board’s emergency work and the support for the Texas Baptist Men’s organization. I knew it would be difficult for Ray to cover my assignments, but he was also excited about the invitation. Ray saw it as a research project for using outdoor education and wilderness skills in mission work.

It was exactly that in many ways. We later developed conferences and materials about using these skills in mission work.

When permission to go to Honduras was granted, I began my research into the team’s preparation, launch, and progress. As I was briefed, a miraculous story began to unfold!

Dr. Jimmy Allen, the pastor of First Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, was approached by a lady in his congregation who asked him to pray for her home country. She told him about Hurricane FiFi and its impact on Honduras. The lady was the Consul General for Honduras at their consulate in San Antonio. Dr. Allen had been very excited about TBM’s disaster relief program and knew a lot about it. He put her need and our Baptist resources together. His call to Bob Dixon told of hungry people in Honduras, people living in school buildings, some people buried in mud slides, homes destroyed, and humanitarian aid being delayed by washed out or buried roads, downed bridges, and shortage of transportation.

The TBM team prayed and determined that this was God’s call for them. It was to be their first international disaster response.

They packed the mobile unit with rice and beans, the staple foods of Honduras, and loaded several pickup trucks with personal gear. The caravan started its journey from Dallas and it was to proceed through Mexico to Belize.

The plan Bob devised was to circumvent the ruined infrastructure of southern Guatemala and northern Honduras by going through Mexico into Belize. In Belize City, he planned to put the mobile unit on a barge, ship it across the Gulf of Honduras, and unload it in Puerto Cortez, Honduras. From there, it would be driven to the town of El Progreso. El Progreso was the center of the refugee shelter area.

I joined the team in Belize. I was not in any of the planning sessions. When I arrived in Belize, I realized why I had been called.

In transit through Mexico City, the crew had not calculated the rig's height into metric measurements. When they went under an overpass, they assumed that the truck would fit since other trucks were on the same highway. It almost worked. The last overpass was three inches short!

As the truck went under, the bridge girders began shearing three inches of the trailer top off. The truck became wedged under the bridge so tightly it took two wreckers, a fire truck, and deflating the tires to get loose.

This occurred during the 5pm rush hour traffic. A huge crowd gathered to watch. Every time the wreckers would surge to the end of their cables, the crowd would cheer! Finally, when the fire truck joined the tug of war, the rig was pulled free and the crowd broke out in cheers of, "Ole! Ole! Ole!"

The top of the trailer had been sheared back twelve feet. It resembled a giant sardine can but the metal was wrinkled like an accordion. However, it was standing in the air at about a 45 degree angle. The team roped it down and drove south toward Vera Cruz.

When I designed the unit, it was to use freeze-dried food. This made dual axles under the rear unnecessary because the food was light. The need for beans and rice for Honduras was so urgent the team did not calculate the load's weight and the trailer was overloaded.

The Dorsey Electronics van that I had used to build the unit had the smaller truck tires, not the usual 18 wheel type truck tire. The tires began to overheat and blow out. Eventually, one caught fire. All of this was being reported to Bob Dixon by radio as he was in the air on his way to Belize.

Bob's pilot was Bill Arnold, the man who had flown with me as we cleared the Padre Island beaches before Hurricane Carla. He was made aware that the tire sizes were not available in southern Mexico. Bill landed in Belize, refueled, and flew back to Texas to buy new tires.

Bob stayed in Belize to finalize the details for loading the truck on a barge and using a tugboat to transport it to Honduras. When he discovered the beans and rice load was the tire problem, he contacted a missionary in the Yucatan for help. The missionary said that their area also suffered from the hurricane and he had a lot of hungry people to feed. Bob found beans and rice available in Belize, so he told the crew to unload the food to be used in the Yucatan.

The lesson learned was a reaffirmation of Romans 8:28. "All things work together for the good of those who are called..." For example, in Mexico City, thousands gathered at the accident scene...and they all saw the signs on the trailer which said "Texas Baptists Helping Honduras". This was a real boost to our work in Mexico City. It helped inform people of our humanitarian aid work. The sign about helping Honduras was one of the reasons the people were cheering when the unit was pulled free from the bridge.

The other example of this scripture's truth was in the overloaded trailer. It was apparently a real problem for the overloaded truck tires and slowed the crew's progress. However, the food was delivered to a missionary who was trying to help a suffering people. Perfect timing and perfect placement!

Bob was having other difficulties as he waited for the mobile disaster unit to arrive. He contacted the tugboat company to tell them when to expect the trucks arrival and asked which wharf to use when they moored the 150 foot barge.

They reacted in surprise, "You are really coming? The big freight truck is really going to be here?" Bob gave them an affirmative answer to both questions and was shocked by their reply, "We do not have a barge that big."

Bob was stunned! “When I called you from Texas, you said that you had a 150 ft. barge and it would not be a problem.”

“Yes,” they said, “But we did not really think that you would come. We have the tugboat but not the barge.”

The lesson of Romans 8:28 was about to get its second affirmation of the day.

Bob went back to the Belize Hotel extremely disappointed and depressed. As he walked through the lobby, an American employee of Texaco, whom he had met the night before, said, “Hey, Tex! You look like you lost your best friend. Do you have a problem?”

Bob replied, “Yes, I do, but it is nothing that a 150 foot barge couldn’t fix.”

The man asked for an explanation, so Bob told him the whole story about the mission, the problems, and the broken promise by the shipping company. The man smiled and told Bob, “I work for Texaco and I have the only 150 ft. barge in the country. However, I cannot use it right now because of the storm. If you need it, I will loan it to you. Where do you want it docked?”

Bob went into orbit without a rocket or a launch pad!

A broken promise, a broken spirit, and a very sad face were used to bring a powerful blessing!

I flew into Belize City just hours ahead of the unit’s arrival. When I saw it, I was shocked! It looked like a wreck...which it was. Bob asked, “Johnny, can you fix it?” I told him I needed to study the damage, pray and plan overnight, and I would tell him at breakfast.

My investigation revealed several undiscovered blessings that we had received when we were constructing the unit. God knew what was in the future, we did not. I opened the side doors and discovered the doors worked freely, no binding.

As I explained in the construction chapter, the way the cabinets had been constructed made the side walls ridged and prevented wrinkling or deformation. The exterior trailer top had been sheared off at the upper edge of the lumber we used to brace the cabinets and to which we attached the ceiling panels. I had prayed about the placing, spacing and configuration of this lumber. If it had been any closer to the roof, it would have been hit by the bridge girders and destroyed. This would have resulted in the destruction of the ceiling, the lighting systems (12 volt and 120 volt), and the cabinet support structure. This would have caused the cabinets to fall into the center aisle. But, the plywood ceiling and everything else, except the roof were totally undamaged!

My challenge was to repair the roof and make it waterproof while Bob was purchasing replacement food supplies.

Another answered prayer had been the creation of a work bench, repair station, and tool bin in an unused doorway on the side of the trailer. It even contained an oxygen-acetylene welding and cutting unit, sledge hammer, and carpentry tools. I really made my original inventory list an object of prayer, because I had no way of knowing what repairs would be needed to what kind of apparatus under what circumstances.

I had everything I needed tool wise, all I needed were a few supplies from local sources. God never wastes anything. The experiences I had in auto repair shops, auto body shops, machine shops, and foundry work had been good preparation for this task.

It took two days to hammer the roof into a flat sheet again, stabilize it, and build, what Bob called a “sombrero”. It was a wooden frame covered with canvas, which would make the roof watertight again.

Two days lost in the delay...no! It all fit into God’s plan.

Two teenage girls came down the street where I was working. They stopped and watched for a while, then walked on chatting with each other. I had smiled and waved at them ever so briefly, as I continued my work with the sledge hammer. They were the only Belizeans who came down that street all day (my hammering noise may have deterred others).

That evening I began to ask Bob and the team about the official papers we would need to get into Honduras. Belize was an easy entry. It had been a colony of Great Britain, known as British Honduras, until a few years earlier. No passport, visa, or any other documents were needed for Americans, just a voter's registration or a driver's license was enough. My question was met with blank looks. "Did you bring a letter from the Consul General? Do you have a letter of invitation from the Honduran government? Does the U.S. State Department know you are doing this?" every question was met with a negative answer.

The mobile clinic group, Amigos Internacionales, I helped start in 1967 had been working in Belize for over six years. I had made several trips doing Bible Schools, evangelistic meetings, doing medical and dental clinics. Their licensing, import rules, etc. were familiar. I also knew what the neighboring countries required. I knew we were in trouble!

The problems had already started to surface when Bob tried to buy food, no one would take his check or credit card. I had to write checks from our Amigos account in the Belizean bank. God had solved the problem six years before it occurred.

The two teenagers came by on the second day. They stood in the street a long time, watching. One of the girls timidly asked, "What are you doing?" I smiled and told her the story of the American Christian group sending help to Honduras for the hurricane victims. I told her of our problems and our repairs to be made.

She replied, "I must tell my father about this. It will make him so happy!" I asked her why this would make her father happy and her reply stunned me!

"My father is the ambassador to Belize from Honduras!" I jumped off the ladder, ran to her and said that we had a problem with entering Honduras because we had no official papers. She smiled and told me to follow her home and her daddy would write some for us. When I left her home, I had a fist full of papers with stamps, official seals, and letters of introduction...some of these were stained with her father's tears of gratitude.

God is sooo good!

Think about it...no wreck...no repairs...no delay...no contact with the ambassador...no papers.

Ernest Liebig and I were left in Belize to load the barge and ride with the unit across the Bay of Honduras. Bob and the others flew into Honduras to meet with the missionaries and to prepare them for our arrival.

Ernie and I drove the unit to the dock, the tug came with the barge, and moored it with the bow against the dock so we could put the unit on and drive to the balance point of the barge. This was to keep the barge level fore and aft, as well as port to starboard. The boat crew had to use every scrap of rope they had for stabilizing lines to hold the barge's bow squarely against the dock in the current of the Belize River. Ernie looked at the conglomeration of ropes...some frayed, several different diameters, and all tied together with unrecognizable knots. He shook his head and said, "I cannot believe this!"

The real challenge came when we realized the barge deck was four feet higher than the dock and there were no ramps or gantry crane to lift the truck.

We prayed!

Lesson being learned: panic promotes prayer...if panic is properly managed (I will explain that in another book sometime).

We said, "Amen", and Ernie said, "La Noue, look at that pile of lumber. Could we use that in some way?" I told him that GOD must have dumped it while we were praying because I had not seen it before! It was a pile of creosoted bridge timbers. Some of them were over three inches thick, twelve inches wide, and twelve feet long! Perfect!

We made a horizontal wedge shaped stack and topped it with vertically oriented boards that reached the edge of the barge's deck. All the boards were loose, and my prayer was for the stack to hold together as I drove over it. If it scattered or collapsed, the truck would ram the bow of the barge, snap the old ropes and I would fall in the river. The other problem was how to get up enough speed to climb the pile and be able to stop before running off the other end, or going so far toward the other end or the side and make it capsize.

Another problem was the river. The Belize River was the sewer of the country. Every village had public toilets built on stilts out over the river. It was so full of catfish that fed on sewage when you threw anything in the river, it would come alive and look like it was boiling with fish.

My solution to the river problem: "Ernie, do you have a pistol?"

He said, "Yes." I told him to get it, because if anything went wrong, and I was going into the river, to shoot me before I hit the water. I did not want to hit the water alive!

Problem: he thought I was teasing.

I made two attempts. We restacked the pile for a longer run at a shallower angle after the first time failed, but made it on the second try. Ernie and I tied the axles to deck cleats. It seemed secure enough, so we put Jerry Bob Taylor's pickup truck behind the unit and tied it down. The pickup had a camper cover on it with two bunks. The tugboat came at sundown, put a towing yoke on the barge, and started out of the harbor.

We were tired to the bone! Sleep came quickly. About midnight, Ernie shook me awake, "Did you feel that?" I confessed that in my stupor I could not feel anything. He was right we were stuck on a sand bar. The tug was weaving back and forth as the crew shined a light in the water. They were looking for the channel. I discovered later that the boat's compass had been broken for over a year, and the captain navigated at night by lighting the shallow ocean floor so he could see what growth and rocks were there. He could tell by the sea life and the reefs where he was. Amazing!

By daybreak we were in the deeper water of the Bay of Honduras. The wind came up and the ocean swells began to build. The mobile unit was rocking so badly we were afraid it would break loose and tip over.

Ernie broke out the logging chains and boomers. I climbed up the side of the trailer and hooked the chains in the tiedown brackets, then crawled over the deck to the deck cleats on the edge of the barge, and hooked the chains in place. I had to be careful to hook up to the truck first so I could hold on to the chain and not get pitched overboard, since barges have no rails or sidewalls.

The waves reached about five or six feet and breakers began to wash the deck. This made us very uneasy because we were going to be unloading the barge in an unprotected harbor.

We reached Puerto Cortez about mid afternoon. Bob and the team were there to meet us on the dock.

Same problem in reverse: the loaded barge was four feet higher than the dock. The team was worried about getting it off safely. They knew nothing about how we loaded it! Ernie spotted it first, “John, look! Beside that warehouse there is another stack of those timbers!”

“Thank you, Lord!” was my muttered prayer.

Ernie directed the team as they built a ramp like our Belize contraption while I worked on a new problem. The swells were four feet high in the harbor and the barge was rising and falling four feet with each wave. Now the problem was to hit the ramp when it was a moving target!

I watched the bow rise and fall, counting the seconds of each phase, so I would know when to reach the bow and jump to the ramp with the tractor. I would need to stop and wait for the next cycle to bring the rear trailer axles off on to the ramp at the moment the bow was level with the ramp.

I prayed a lot! I prayed a whole lot! I followed Paul’s admonition to pray without ceasing!

The tractor timing worked perfectly. As the bow rose on the next swell it came up under the trailer eight feet in front of its rear axle, the team on the dock started running and yelling, “It’s going to blow! Everybody RUN!” I was thinking, “Blow? What is going to blow? I cannot run, I am in this truck cab holding the brake.” Then I saw the bow descending, resumed my timing, and dragged the trailer off to safety.

When they explained what had happened, I thanked God for His guidance in the unit’s construction. I referred to this in a previous chapter, but a quick recap might help. I had to have the propane tank made as a special item due to size and configuration. The tube, or pipe, used for the walls was unusually thick steel, I had steel baffles welded inside to prevent the liquid from surging back and forth when stopping or starting. All of this made the tank excessively strong...Thank God!

I saw a picture later that showed the bow rising and the lip of the deck striking the propane tank dead center. The lifting continued until the rear wheels of the trailer were suspended in mid air. The entire weight of the loaded trailer was bearing down on approximately two inches of tank’s bottom surface!

When it was checked for deformation and damage, none could be found, except scraped paint.

The team began the trip to El Progreso in the most unusual manner. I had taken the truck off the barge, parked it, gathered the papers from the ambassador, and started looking for a customs official, since none were present when we disembarked. A man came running and shouting toward us. I saw his badge and waved the papers in the air, shouting, “Here are the papers!” in Spanish. He replied, “Forget the papers! I am so glad that you came to my country!” He grabbed me, kissed me on both cheeks, and yelled, “The train is coming and your truck is parked on the tracks!” I started shouting and running for the truck. I moved it just in time, sat quivering at the wheel, thinking, “I have never had this kind of entry into any country where I have worked!” Looking back on the whole operation, I think it was somewhere between a missionary journey of the Apostle Paul and the Keystone Cops movie.

Driving from the port to El Progreso was a real challenge. Some roads had houses washed up on them, some roads had been undermined and caved in, and some roads were missing all of their surfacing material. We were driving on one road that was only wet sand and noticed people digging in the sand. One man told us he was digging down to find the front door of his house where his family had been buried in the mud slide. It was then that we saw six to twelve inches of roofs protruding from the sand all over the area where the village had been.

The road ended at a river. There was no pavement and no bridge. The road could be seen continuing across the river, but there were 200 yards of river for us to cross!

We prayed!

People were fording the river, so we could gauge its depth and the very slow current. After checking the firmness of the bottom, we decided to drive across.

The water came up in the tractor's engine compartment to the point that the radiator cooling fan was submerged. This caused the blades to arc forward and cut the rear flues of the radiator.

When the truck pulled out of the river and on to the roadbed, steam was coming from under the hood. Jerry Bob Taylor's father-in-law, Herman Crawford, was a retired mechanic. He crawled up in the engine compartment with his pocket knife and a pair of pliers, clearing the damaged fins away, and pinching the cut flues to reduce the water loss.

We needed something to stop the leaks like the "Radiator Stop Leak" product that we use in our shops at home. Working as a mechanic in a small shop in Alabama, I learned to use black pepper as a substitute. Jerry Bob said that he had none on the unit. A missionary from the "New Tribes Mission" stopped and asked what was wrong. He heard our problem and told "Pop" (Herman's nickname) that he used horse apples (chunks of horse manure) crumbled into the radiator tank for that purpose. Pop was still on the fender trying to crimp the flues tighter, so he sent me to pick up the needed manure. In just a few minutes after he stuffed the crumbled manure in the tank, the leaks began to slow down and, eventually, stop. The remedy worked so well that the truck was driven home without any other repairs.

The unit reached El Progreso and was parked between two schools which had become refugee shelters. There were four other school shelters, but they were not near each other.

We were setting up the unit as a huge crowd gathered. When they found out who we were and what we were going to do, we had too many willing volunteers. A fence was erected for crowd control and a platoon of Honduran soldiers was assigned to us for crowd control.

There was a lieutenant in command of the group. He was about 6'2", wore a red beret, and always stood ramrod straight. He never spoke to us and would only speak to his troops in sharp commands. His eyes were constantly scanning the scene and he did not miss anything.

The Baptist missionaries introduced us to the pastor and congregation of the small Baptist mission church in El Progreso. One of our goals was to help the local Christian group help their own townspeople, so when we were gone the people would remember the church folks who helped them.

God's orchestration of our response was more evident every day. Every time we stumbled we fell upstairs! Our experience was limited to our Texas disaster events. Our experience in the Texas Mexican culture was helpful...but this was an international response in a foreign country. The politics, customs, and cuisine were different.

God sent us help. Some of it was not necessarily happy help. Some of the local missionaries were not happy because we did not come at their request through the International Mission Board (formerly, the Foreign Mission Board). Our response was made at the request of the Honduran Consulate in Texas.

This made us appear to be a possible threat to their work because we wore the Baptist label but were not under their guidance and direction. If we messed up, or caused problems it could endanger their work. One of the missionaries referred to us as "a group of glory seeking laymen who had no business coming to Honduras in a disaster".

This attitude was quickly changed with our arrival. We placed our team and equipment at their disposal. They were amazed by our unit, its equipment, its capabilities, our coordinated team work in the set up process, and the willingness to work with them, and be under their supervision.

The small Baptist mission church in El Progreso came to help us. The young pastor of this small congregation of very poor, but very dedicated Christians, was so eager to serve. His people followed his example.

I asked him about the way the people seasoned their food. I was trying to be culturally sensitive. He replied, "Talk to Dona Concha. She does the cooking for our large camp meetings." I was elated! God had given us a local cook who understood mass feeding!

She was accustomed to feeding 100 to 150 people at the mission's summer camp. We were able to multiply her recipes easily to provide for our large number of 6,000 refugees.

Dona Concha was a very sharp worker. Once she saw what we were doing, it became her kitchen and we became the maintenance technicians. Our job was to keep the unit supplied with fuel, water, and food supplies.

After three days of operation, the food supplies purchased in Belize were almost gone. We were living in prayer every day about everything. Our prayer time was joined by the local church members who were our workers. We prayed for a food supply.

I was very busy attempting to find a food supplier in Honduras when the Lieutenant in the red beret approached me. I was surprised that he even moved! I was a little suspicious of him because of his stern military manner and his total lack of communication with us. He said, "I have been watching you."

I replied, "Yes, I know you are very observant and handle your soldiers well. Thank you for your protection."

"I have been watching you and you have not charged anyone for the food." He said.

"We do not charge the people for the food because the Baptist Christians in the United States are sad that your people are suffering, and they paid for the food we brought." I replied. He was amazed!

"You are treating everyone the same. Your group eats the same food you feed the people. I think you are very honest. How can I help you?" He asked.

Since I had no idea about his orders or resources, as I was thanking him for his protection...he interrupted me with a very stern question in a commanding tone, "What do you NEED?"

"Oh," I said, "Food. We need food. Rice, beans..."

"What about coffee and sugar?" he asked.

"Yes." I answered.

"What about meat?" he asked.

In disbelief, I said, "You can't get meat!"

Coming to his full command mode, he shot the question to me again, "Do YOU want MEAT?!"

"Yes," I stammered.

He extended his hand and said, "Give me the keys to your pickup truck."

"Uh oh, I know nothing about this man and he wants the keys to our truck...this is not good." I thought...as I handed him the keys. My teammates were very surprised by this action. I explained this man had been in control of our safety and equipment since we arrived, so why worry about a pickup truck? However, I prayed a lot.

About six hours later he returned with the truck and food...so much food that the rear bumper was almost on the ground and the front end was almost off the ground! There were beans, rice, sugar, coffee, etc., all in 100 kilogram (220 lbs.) sacks. They were piled higher than the cab of the pickup truck!

I asked him why everything was in 220 lb. sacks and he informed me that one man cannot steal a sack that big so it is safer to store. He told us that the meat would be smaller packages. I had no idea about what kind of meat he had found. I hoped it was canned meat not fresh meat.

He took the truck, two soldiers, a tarpaulin we used to cover our equipment, the pickup truck, and left. I prayed a lot more.

A few hours later he returned. The truck's rear bumper was almost touching the road and the headlights were pointing skyward. "Over loaded", does not begin to describe the truck and its contents. They pulled the cover off of the load revealing a huge stack of frost covered boxes of frozen meat from Argentina. It appeared to be 1500 to 2000 pounds of frozen meat and I only had 16 cubic feet in my refrigerator! Panic prayer time!

The Father supplied an answer. I had every box put in a plastic garbage bag, wrapped the package in a heavy wool blanket, and inserted this in a second bag. These bundles were placed in the mobile unit's storage bins and the bin's doors were closed tightly. The meat stayed frozen for several days. We were able to significantly strengthen the diet of the refugees for several days...then the lieutenant did it again...and again!

Our generator had been running twenty-four hours a day and we needed to get local power as soon as possible. I saw an electrical company crew working several blocks away. "Perhaps they would be working our way eventually," I thought. I walked down to talk to the supervisor, thinking he might give me an answer. When I asked how long before his crew could get power to our location, he replied, "Maybe a week or more."

I noticed his Spanish had an interesting accent. He sounded like one of my Cajun friends in South Louisiana speaking Spanish. I asked if he spoke French and he replied in French. Then he saw the name badge on my cap. His eyes opened wide and he yelled, "La Noue, mon frer!" He grabbed me in a bear hug and kissed me on both cheeks.

He jumped up and down shaking my hand and telling me that our families were both Huguenots (French Calvinists) and fought in the religious wars of France in the 16th Century. He wiped tears from his eyes, hugged me again while sobbing, "They fought side by side!" He was referring to my ancestor, Francois de La Noue, a Huguenot General.

We had electricity before dinner.

Our communications needs were growing daily. We discovered USAID had shipped tons of a product called CSB (corn and soy bean blend) and no one knew what to do with it. Our water supply was being delivered by a fire truck. The water was murky and our question was how do you purify it? We were hurting for information in many areas.

In the midst of our need, a nurse from Caravans for Christ paid us a visit. She asked if we had a shortwave radio. I told her we did but did not have an antenna for it. She asked if it were capable of using 20 meters. I said it was only for 20 meters. Her reply stunned me, "I have a 20 meter antenna in my suit case and will give it to you if you will let me contact my family in America."

Whoopee! God is good! That was an answer to a prayer I had not even prayed yet!

We set up the antenna and Dr. David Harms, M.D., an IMB missionary to Honduras and a Ham radio operator put the station on the air. Our first contact was a Ham operator in Longview, Texas.

My source for water purity information was the owner of AnaLab, Dr. Charles Whitesides, who lived only twenty miles from Longview, in Kilgore, Texas. I asked the Ham to call him and tell him that John La Noue needed water purifying information.

There was a long pause, then the operator said, "I will do that for you, but there is a little old lady here who wants to talk to you while I call."

The next thing I heard was an elderly lady's voice saying, "John, this is Mama Milroy." I could hardly believe it...this was the retired dietician and cafeteria manager from my school, Stephen F. Austin State University! I remembered spending nights in the hospital with her son when he was recuperating from an auto accident...now he was the Ham operator helping us in our mission.

My mind flipped to my feeding problem. "Mama Milroy, it is so good to hear from you! I have a food problem. What can I do with a corn soy blend that looks like cornmeal? I have tons of it and a lot of hungry people."

She thought a minute and said, "Hush Puppies would be good if you can fry it. Just put 25 pounds in a pot and..." she followed with the complete recipe and cooking instructions followed by several other uses.

Dr. Whitesides came on the ham phone patch and asked, "La Noue, where are you and what are you up to?" He was my prayer partner and helper in building the first mobile clinic described in an earlier chapter. When I explained my situation, he told me how to flock the turbidity and purify the water with chlorine. He said he would send me a purifying unit used on tug boats. It was suit case size and yet, very effective.

In the following exchange of transmissions, we were able to file a report for the BGCT Disaster Office and leave information for Mr. Milroy to call our families.

As we were signing off, Mr. Milroy asked, "Could you use some 2 meter equipment? I have a base station and four hand held units I would like to send you." I thought Dr. Harms was going to fall off the stool with excitement!

"Yes, yes!" he stammered.

What a gold mine that radio call became!

A donated, home constructed, Heath Kit radio and an antenna donated by a missionary nurse, and a missionary medical doctor who "happened" to be a radio operator with a Honduran license...all came together in the mobile disaster unit in El Progreso, Honduras at the precise moment when we were desperate for information.

We had our water purity problem solved, our food questions answered, our families and partners informed, and a blessing bestowed that was beyond our wildest dreams! The radios! Only God could pull a stunt like that! We were ready to dance a holy jig like King David!..but, being Baptists, we just hugged each other and shouted a lot!

When all of the promised items arrived, it was Christmas in September. The water was clean and the radios permitted communication from the various refugee centers. Dr Harms would prepare a clinic bag for me each day and I would visit the refugee centers. I would take temperatures, blood pressure, record the symptoms, and note the patient's appearance. I would call Dr. Harms on the radio, give him the information from my triage, and he could make a follow up visit if necessary. It saved him a lot of time and multiplied the effectiveness of his clinic ministry.

The disaster unit work area had to be fenced to keep the curious small children away from the food preparation and maintenance areas. I had no idea about the impression we were making on these children, however, it surfaced twenty-five years later. But, that is another story.

We prayed without ceasing every day about everything. To breathe was to pray. There was the constant sense of God's presence, God's awesome presence! I had the feeling that everything I did was under His gaze. Actually, as I learned in a later venture, He had angels guarding and ministering to us constantly.

I want to pause in this report to insert a little practical theology that forms the basis of my faith and my faith forms the basis of my actions of service. I have held several theories of inspiration in my lifetime, as I have held various views of different translations. I have treasured my studies in systematic theology. All of my theological studies were beneficial, mentally stimulating, and exciting to ponder...in the halls of the seminary.

However, when you are staring at the bayonet end of an Iranian AK47, or you are working for months behind enemy lines in North Korea, or you are working in Bosnian areas where Americans have been bombing, or you are working in the area of Mexico City where the police do not go, you discover theories and philosophies do not matter. When you have no resources but God, He is all you need!

I have gone into these places and many more with my Bible in my right hand, prayer in my left hand, Jesus in my heart, the Holy Spirit in my head telling me what to say as I walk in "the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. 91:1).

My practical theology is simple:

The Bible is absolutely true.

God meant everything He said in it.

You can trust God to keep His promises.

When God is your only resource, He is all you need.

My life's response to these truths: walk in fearless obedience and joy in the will of God!

I will be gladly identified with those "mystical idiots" who really believe that Jesus meant what He said.

Back to the story.

My last full day with the unit was on Wednesday. The day started, as usual, at 5:00am, cooking the beans that had soaked all night, a large group of ladies making tortillas, and all the other breakfast items being prepared. The other meal was prepared as soon as the morning food was out of the kitchen. It takes a lot of planning and labor to cook 6,000 meals twice per day. We had everything cleaned and the beans soaking for Thursday by 7:00pm. Then it was time to go to the prayer meeting at the little Baptist mission church.

I was sitting in the middle of the church when I heard motor vehicles outside. I counted the sound of six auto doors closing. I knew only one church member had a truck. It had two doors. I went on high alert when I heard the rattle of weapons being handled. The little girl next to me tapped my leg and pointed over her shoulder to the front door. I looked at her and shook my head, "No." She gave me an insistent thump and pointed again. When I looked back, my heart sank. The outside, frontal area of the church was filled with a squad of soldiers and a colonel pointing his finger at me motioning for me to come out. It looked like bad news.

I wished I had left on Tuesday.

As I approached, the colonel said, "I am glad you are here. We thought we had missed you."

Since the military could have signaled a problem, I thought, "I wish you had missed me."

He indicated that he had a gift for me and wanted to present it to me in the church. With a sigh of relief, I told him that he was welcome to come in, but the people were having a prayer meeting and they must finish first. The colonel sat next to me, the mayor was next to him and the soldiers filled the back pews.

Near the end of the service the colonel asked, "Are these the people helping you?"

"Yes, since 5:00 a.m."

With awe in his voice, he said, "It is 8:00 p.m. They must be tired, but still they come to pray. Listen to their prayers...they are not praying for themselves! They are praying for the other victims and for us, the government! I have never seen such dedication!"

I sensed the pew was quivering. I discovered it was the mayor. He was looking around the church and shaking like a leaf in the wind. I discovered later that the Holy Spirit was moving in his heart. He prayed to receive Christ later.

The pastor welcomed the delegation and the mayor presented me with a plaque. The colonel made a speech and presented me a handmade Honduran flag, made by one of the refugees. I treasure it!

I made an acceptance speech honoring the local church which "sponsored" us, elevating the pastor in the eyes of the officials. I thanked the Honduran government for their cooperation and protection. I closed with a prayer of blessing for the church, the military and the country.

The next day I was very thankful for the meeting because I had a problem at the airport. They would not sell me a ticket or approve my exit request. The problem was from our entry into the country. The port official was so glad to see us that he did not do my entry paperwork. I did not have the proper papers to leave. I was negotiating, pleading, and arguing with the official, but was making no headway.

Suddenly the colonel from El Progreso stepped to my side! I looked up in surprise as he asked, "Is there a problem?"

After I explained my situation, he quietly stepped behind the counter, took the official aside, and talked to him. I watched the official as his jaw dropped and his eyes got bigger and bigger as the colonel talked. He ran back to the counter and stamped all my paper so rapidly it sounded like a machine gun. The colonel looked up at me, smiled, and left. I wonder if angels wear uniforms in Honduras occasionally?

The unit stayed for several months. It was moved to an area for feeding families as they reconstructed their homes. The church had a revival at the new location and Bob Dixon loves to tell the story of a lady giving birth in the unit's medical section while people were being born again under the canopy.

Eventually, the unit was driven back to Texas over the repaired roads. It came all the way home without any radiator leaks...the horse manure stopped the leaks permanently!

Twenty-five years later I returned to Honduras for Hurricane Mitch. Three Honduran Baptist pastors met me at the airport, as we were walking to their car I heard them quizzing each other about me.

One said, "Does this brother sound familiar?"

Another queried, "Yes, brother, I think I know him too, but from where?"

The third pastor said, "I know I know him from someplace, doesn't his voice sound familiar?"

Since Spanish is my second language, I stopped and ask them, "Is there a problem, I understand you have a question?"

One of them, who was about 35 years old, said, “Brother we think we know you from someplace. Have you been here before?”

I told them I had not been to Tegucigalpa before, but I had been to El Progreso twenty-five years ago.

Their faces lit up with smiles and said, “That is it! You came in a big truck with a kitchen. You fixed beans and rice, and soup for us! You fed us for a long time! We were little boys and we watched you everyday!”

I remembered having to put a rope around the kitchen area to keep the children from under our feet. I remembered the row of children’s faces smiling at us from the rope line as they watched us all day.

I ask them about the church at El Progreso? I remember it was a small wooden building and the Sunday school had to meet under a house on stilts. They said, “Wait until you see it now!”

We drove to El Progreso, where I was suppose to develop a volunteer center for American volunteers coming to help rebuild the area. When they drove up to the church, I was extremely surprised. It had a large auditorium, a two story educational space and a gymnasium. It covered an entire city block. Not only was it a church, but it also had a school Kindergarten through 12th grade.

There is no way I can describe my emotions when I saw the results of the work twenty-five years later, to which we had contributed.

Chapter 11

Learning to Harmonize with God's Orchestration

I have seen God at work in so many ways and in so many places, yet, I am always amazed and thrilled when I see Him in action! The way He orchestrates His work is so subtle it seems as if things are simply falling into place. But you suddenly become aware that He is putting things in place with precision and perfection.

One example of this is the mobile clinic that was built for the North American Mission Board's missionary in Tucson, Arizona. The project started in 1969 while I was on the Baptist General Convention of Texas' staff. The Baptist Sunday School Board developed a mobile classroom to be used in training church staff in the various state Baptist Conventions. It contained the latest teaching tools, electronics, visual aids, etc.

It came to the BGCT building and all of those with teaching and training assignments were given a tour of the unit. It was built in what had been a mobile library bus. The unit was very impressive. It was as large as a highway, or, touring bus. It had a generator, restroom, water supply, public address system, and every conceivable teaching aid. As the lecturer demonstrated its features, explained its purpose, and possible utilization; all I could think about was what a great mobile clinic it would make.

Four years later, as an employee of the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tennessee, I spotted it behind a storage building. I watched it for months. It never moved. I discovered that it was no longer requested since the advancement of new educational equipment and electronics had made it obsolete. Wow! I started praying about acquiring it for a mobile clinic because I sensed God was up to something.

I told several of my associates in the Church Recreation Department about my idea of acquiring it and making it into a mobile clinic. Their collective evaluation was, "La Noue, you are nuts!" They were fantastic people and great Christians, but they had not been down the path God had provided for me. Their experiences with God had been in areas of drama, sports, music, producing church literature, etc. They were an extremely creative group...but, this kind of project was outside their fields of imagination.

After a lot of prayer, I was convinced God was giving me His directions for the project. I approached the BSSB's Executive office about the availability of the unit. I asked if it were for sale. The folks shrugged and said they had not thought about it. I told them I would like to buy it and convert it to a mobile clinic for mission use. The administrative group considered the idea for a few weeks and finally agreed to sell it to me. They said they would strip all of the teaching aids, screens, projectors, and sound equipment out of it, and sell it to me for \$6,000.

I was so excited! I called Jim Wren the president of Amigos Internacionales, Inc in Texas. When I explained what I sensed God was doing, he gave me permission to make it an Amigos' clinic and start a fund in Tennessee to build it. I was so excited about the project that I told the people in the office what had happened. I held up the check book on the empty account and ask them to join me in praying for \$6,000 to put in the account. They shook their heads and expressed their collective evaluation of me and my project, "La Noue, you really are nuts!" I explained what I had seen God do in the past and asked them to either pray for my success if God was in the project or my sanity if He was not. They agreed to pray for me, but their promises lacked the enthusiasm of faith I felt was necessary for success. So, I prayed for them. I

prayed that the Holy Spirit would translate whatever they prayed into a prayer of faith. I prayed that God would use this event as a faith growth event for them...and for me.

It is difficult, at times, to pursue what you understand to be God's will in the face of doubt from those whom you respect as spiritual people. I had to pray a lot in order to proceed with assurance. I have learned that every opposing person and thought must be brought to the Lord for His evaluation. If I am getting off track and He is sending a message I need to hear, I do not want to miss it. But if it Satan trying to derail God's plan, I want to avoid his detour.

One of the most insidious methods Satan uses is to substitute "good" for "best"! If he cannot lead us in the opposite direction when we are following God, he will try to get us, at least, a few degrees off of God's course. The direction may appear to be good, but you will miss the intended destination. I have been a pilot for 55 years and I know how a few degrees off course can be a big problem on a long trip! This is a lesson I have learned "along the way"!

God responded to our prayers as He did when I built the first mobile clinic. People began calling and writing, asking what project was I working on. Money began to come in response to requests that I had answered. In a little over a month, I had a little over \$6,000 in the Amigos' checking account! When the Church Recreation Staff was gathered in our conference room for coffee, I held up the checkbook and asked, "Anyone care to guess how much God has sent for the mobile clinic in response to your prayers?" I was greeted by total silence.

I broke the silence by saying, "Over \$6,000! We have a great God!" I think all of us climbed a step higher on our ladder of faith because they were surprised by what God had done and I was relieved that it happened so quickly!

I bought the bus, took it home, and began to examine its structure. The needed modifications were noted, the conversion plans were drafted, and the mobile clinic plans were completed. I made a list of needed parts and equipment. Money kept coming in until all of the needed items and supplies were purchased.

Everything was ready for the construction to begin except one thing...workers! No one from any of the local churches responded to the project's need for workers to help with the construction. When I spoke to any group about the project, the usual response was, "That's nice." But, no offers of help came.

My job required 175 days of travel each year and every week day that I was in town, I was required to be in the office. Time to do the project by myself was not available. I had a choice to make: either pray and trust God, or frustrate and complain. Knowing God was doing the project gave me one option, pray and trust the Father's will and be patient with His timing.

The travel assignments for our department called for me to speak to a church conference in Abilene, Texas. I looked in the backyard of my home as I backed out of the driveway for the trip. There sat the bus, my basement was full of the supplies and equipment, and the plans for the clinic were on my drafting table. I whispered a prayer, "Father, there sits a complete mobile clinic kit. Please send some people to put it together."

An attorney from Amarillo, Texas, C. J. Humphries was also one of the conference speakers. He was very active in Texas Baptist Men and was speaking about involving men in missions and ministry.

Near the end of his presentation, he said, "I see John La Noue is here from the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tennessee. John is one of our Texas Baptists who has been very active involving medical doctors and dentists in mobile clinic ministry along the Rio Grande River. John, I need to talk to you when the meeting is over."

After the session was over, he said, “John, I have to speak to a group of men from the First Baptist Church of Canadian, Texas next week. They have asked me to suggest a project for their men’s group. When I saw you in the audience, God impressed me that you have a project for them. What is it?”

I was amazed! He listened as I explained about the clinic project, the plans I had drawn, and the purchase of all the needed supplies. I said that I had everything but workers to put it together.

“Ah ha,” he said, “John, I feel that God is all over this! Write it up so I can explain it to the men in Canadian.”

C.J. did present it and the men of Canadian responded...more than I ever expected! I thought they might send a team to Nashville, but they told me to pack everything in the unit with the plans and drive it to Oklahoma City. They informed me that a private aircraft would bring a driver to the airport there, and it would take me back to Nashville!

The news was wonderful, but...I had a crisis of belief, “They have never built a mobile clinic. I will not be there to direct the construction. I am essential to this projects success.” Pride in and ownership of the project had gotten a hold on me without me ever suspecting it! Sin! Satan had hooked me before I saw him coming! It was knee time...I got on mine before God bent me over His. As I prayed for forgiveness, the Holy Spirit ran the panorama of the project through my mind: I saw the unit in 1969, realized its clinic potential, God gave it to me in 1974, He gave me the modification plans, He sent the money and supplies as answers to prayer, and now He has sent help. Accept it? I did.

I delivered the unit and got out of the picture.

The men of First Baptist Church in Canadian did a better job than I could have ever done! They modified my modifications and made it better. However, the rest of the story gets even better.

The missionary got the University of Arizona’s College of Medicine to staff the clinic because it was destined to serve the Indian Reservation’s remote areas.

When they delivered it to the missionary, they saw an old clunker, a Chevy Suburban with peeling paint and dents, sitting in his driveway. One of them asked, “Whose old car is that?” The missionary said that it was his, and that is all he had to use in ministry. The guys held a quick conference, called their church, explained the situation, and the church bought the missionary a brand new Suburban!

Lesson learned? I discovered that the picture was better without me in it!

I was not essential to the completion of the project, but my obedience was.

As I looked back over the five year history of the project, I could see the Father orchestrating every detail with perfect timing. Every time I get anxious or frustrated about a ministry I can just hear God saying, “Settle down, John! Why don’t you do like Moses, just take another lap around Mount Sinai until you learn to listen.” I think this project qualifies as “another lesson learned along the way (around Mt. Sinai).”

Chapter 12

God's Plans: Obey Don't Evaluate

One of my closest friends in the ministry, and my spiritual mentor in many ways was Dr. James Mahoney. I had known him from my days at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas.

I was on the football team and a member of the campus Baptist Student Union. Two of my teammates, Edgar Kelly and Ralph Gillam helped me start a prayer group in the athletic dormitory. Jimmy was in his first year of seminary and came to the college every weekend to date one of our BSU girls. He and I became strong friends and our conversations always contained discussions of Scripture, ways to share our faith with others, and other spiritual insights.

His visits on the weekend would give me material I could use every night in our dormitory prayer meetings. Later, he was a pastor for many years and eventually developed a ministry of leading Bible conferences and evangelistic meetings.

This ministry required a lot of travel. He always took his whole family with him. Betty, his wife had a master's degree in education and taught public school many years. She was involved in the ministry with their three daughters as a music team. Betty was home schooling the girls.

Jimmy called me and asked if I would convert a highway bus into a motor home for his family. We spent hours on the phone developing the list of electronics, audio and video equipment, bedroom arrangements, dinette and kitchen arrangements, classroom, etc.

Several months later I was still praying about the project, drafting plans, and looking for a suitable bus. In the middle of all of this, I received a call from a very excited Dr. Mahoney. "John, you will not believe what just happened! I am in Casper, Wyoming conducting a conference. A lady, who recently lost her husband, has offered to give us the bus that he converted to a motor home! It will need some modifications to meet our needs. Will you help me?"

I became as excited as he was! God had given us a shortcut! I did not even stop to pray about it, I just said, "Yes, just bring it to me in Nashville."

We had a three year old 23 foot motor home in which we had traveled while I was on assignment for the Baptist Sunday School Board. My wife, who also had a master's degree in education, had been home schooling our children for a year as we traveled to 46 different states. So, we knew what was required to handle the task. We had modified our motor home to handle the job. This gave me some idea of what might be needed for Jimmy's bus.

Several weeks later Jimmy drove his bus to our house. I took one look at it and breathed a prayer. "Oh, Father, I am sorry I did not ask you about this project. I just took it for granted that this was your work."

I expected a Silver Eagle type bus, one like Greyhound or Continental Trailways bus companies use. Nashville is full of these buses used by country western music groups. But, what I was looking at was more like a lead buzzard than a Silver Eagle!

It had been a city bus in San Diego, California...in 1949! The paint was flaking off, what was left was an oxidized shade of blue, much of the white paint on the wheels was chipped off,

the windshield was cracked, it was dented in many places,...but the tires were good! Jimmy left it with us and his parting statement was, "See what you can do with it. I'll be praying for you!"

Not much attention was paid to the power train and running gear because I could not get past the appearance of the bus. To only say it was ugly, would be a complement. It was awesomely ugly! A 1949 GMC city bus was ugly when it was born! Twenty-five years of history as a city bus and residency in a junkyard did nothing to improve its appearance.

Many hours were spent in prayer and sketching modifications, imagineering designs, and just sitting in the yard staring at it. It was GMC, but it would never be a Cadillac! No matter what I did to it on paper, it looked like a tank...a tank that had seen combat!

All my days off from work were consumed by this project. Leaving the bus with my sketchpad and measuring tape in hand, I would walk by our motor home and offer a quiet word of prayer, thanking God for our commercially built unit. It was stylish, neat, serviceable, and debt free.

I would lie awake at night thinking about the Mahoneys driving up to a church to lead a conference in that old bus. I could hear the church leaders asking their pastor, "Are you sure that this is our conference leader?" or, "I hope they do not park that on our church parking lot!"

A strange thing began to happen. When praying about their bus and its apparent hopelessness, my mind would bounce to our motor home and I would thank God for it. Sometime I would be focusing on Jimmy's bus in prayer, literally visualizing it, and my unit would be standing beside his. Our unit was nice enough to be welcomed on any church parking lot. I began to suspect God was up to something. He was!

My wife is a prayer warrior, she is the most godly person I have ever known, she cares only for the will of God, and the driving force in her life is a desire to be obedient to Him. One morning I said, "Honey, I have a problem. Every time I pray about converting Jimmy's bus, our motor home gets in the picture. I know it sounds like a wild, unreasonable idea, but I wonder if God wants us to trade Jimmy our motor home for his bus.

She replied, "Yes, darling, for over a week I have thought that is what He wants us to do." She had known for a week what I was just discovering. I had been thinking of every reason why that exchange would not be reasonable, or even possible, while she was thinking only of God's will.

I called Jimmy and asked if he would trade mobile units us. He was so shocked he had difficulty speaking...but the final answer was, "Yes!!!" I am sure he doubted our sanity! If I had not been so convinced that this was what God wanted, I would have doubted my sanity too!

The lesson I learned in trading our beautiful motor home for the apparent pile of junk was: when God puts something in your hand, do not let it get in your heart. Always be ready to pass the blessing to others when He directs you.

After the trade, the bus, which I named, "Blunderbus", an ancient shotgun type weapon used in Europe in the 1500s, sat in the backyard for months. I thought about spray painting it bronze and calling it a monument to "Ugly". However, I was given a book proposal by the Church Recreation Department and used the unit as my writing room for a month. It served as a backyard office and research center...to my wife's joy, because I make a mess when I am doing research and writing.

When I finally got around to examining the rig, I was shocked! The man who converted it owned a machine shop in Casper, Wyoming. He had stripped out the old Buick engine and original drive train, and replaced it with a rear mounted International V6 truck

engine, a five speed automatic truck transmission, a V drive system of drive shafts, which connected to a two speed axle. He extended the motor compartment and added a rear mounted truck radiator. The original side mounted radiator was left in place and an electric fan was added to cool it. This junky looking bus was driven by a brilliantly designed power unit.

I discovered in the first trial run that he had rebuilt the entire steering system and front end. He even equipped it with air brakes! This apparent pile of junk was a dream machine...except for its appearance.

My work required traveling to Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly and Conference Center for our department's "Recreation Week" program. In addition to teaching outdoor education, I was responsible for transporting all of the equipment, books, programs, displays, etc. needed for the 2500 people attending. Instead of renting a truck, I rented the largest trailer available at U Haul and hooked it on to "Barney Bus". No longer was it Blunderbus, but nicknamed Barney Bus after the Apostle Paul's assistant, Barnabas. The name meant, "Son of consolation", and I had been consoled after I discovered the unit's strengths and utilities.

With the unit loaded with my family, all their gear, all water and fuel tanks filled, and the large trailer attached, my prayer was "God, I hope this works!" Was I ever pleased with its performance? Oh, yes! We cruised through the mountains at the maximum allowable speeds and had power to spare...But it still looked like a junkyard refugee.

During the following months, I became more and more convinced that unit would be a great foundation piece for a disaster relief unit. I became more and more convinced that it was God's plan for me to develop it into a disaster unit. The lesson I had learned about holding things that God gives you in your hand and not let it get into your heart was very important at this point. I had built several mobile medical and dental clinics and two mobile disaster units. These had all been given away without asking anything in return. If this bus became a disaster unit, I assumed it would also be a gift to some group. This would be the end of our family motor home trips around the nation as we home schooled our children.

The praying, planning, and designing covered nearly three months. I made a prayer list which my wife and I prayed daily. The deep conviction that I was to build a disaster unit grew stronger and stronger each day. As I said earlier, my work at the BSSB required 175 days of travel, so building time at home was limited...but blessed. The construction drawings were done, people began calling asking what project I had going, donations came, and the construction began. What a family blessing it became. My teenage son and I did the plumbing, wiring, structural modifications, and my wife and daughter did the "beautification" in the interior. The plumbing and wiring was designed to make it possible to set the kitchen up on either side of the bus. This involved water, propane, electrical, and sewer connections.

A trailer was designed to house a well equipped workshop with a workbench and fully stocked tool cabinet. It also contained an oxygen-acetylene welding and cutting rig. There was a rack to hold a motorcycle, a removable wall that formed a freight compartment for cases of food, and racks built to hold the folding tables and stoves. The rear door was a ramp, the curbside door was the entry door, and the roadside door gave access to the front and electrical panel.

On one of my business trips to Atlanta, GA, I found a friend from my high school days, Merwyn Lee Majors. We were fellow coon hunters and had spent some very interesting nights roaming the woods of Southeast Texas hunting raccoons with our hunting hounds. We talked for hours before we began to share about our work. I discovered his company built portable buildings and office trailers for construction sites. Oh boy! I saw God at work!

I described my project and when I got to the trailer description, he asked who was going to build it? After he was told I was doing it, he said, "John L., you have no business doing that! You are not equipped to do a professional job. Let us do it. Send me the plans and I will give you a wholesale price."

The construction account was down to about \$7,500. My heart sank when he called and said it would cost about \$14,000 to build it. I told him that the cost was far more than I had, but I would try to pray up some more money.

He said, "You keep praying and let's see what God does."

"Merwyn called me a few days later and said, "You are in for a surprise! I talked to my boss and the people on the assembly line. I told them what you needed and what it was to be used for. The workers said they would donate a Saturday to build it. When the Manager heard about it, he donated the use of the factory. All it is going to cost you is about \$7,500 for parts and equipment!" He was ecstatic and I was relieved!

For whom was this disaster unit being built? This was a mystery. Another mystery was the new directions the Lord had given me. I was to ask \$10,000 for the unit. I had never asked anything for the other units. I would be embarrassed to try to "sell" a unit to a group of fellow Baptists. As I discussed this with my financial advisor, my wife, she told me that we had \$23,000 in the unit. The unit's material cost was \$13,000 and the motor home we had traded to Mahoney was about \$10,000.

The BSSB sent me to the Kansas-Nebraska Baptist Convention to do a study of all their camp facilities. This entailed a week of travel in the two states with convention personnel. We were driving to our next camp, I was leaning back in the passenger seat praying for wisdom in land use and camp programming ideas, and suddenly my mind was filled with thoughts about the disaster unit.

I said to my partner, "I feel like Noah."

He queried, "What in the world do you mean?"

I replied, "Noah built an ark in the desert with no water in sight, I am building a disaster unit in my back yard and I have no idea who it is for!"

"What do they cost?" he asked.

I responded, "That is another strange thing about it. I have \$23,000 in the unit and the Father has told me to ask \$10,000 for it because He has covered the other \$13,000."

He yelled "He what? I repeated the story.

He shouted, "John you will not believe this! Our Baptist convention has just voted to start a disaster relief unit and all we have is \$10,000 in the budget! Do not let anyone else have it until I talk to my supervisor!"

By the time he said this, we had been back and forth across both lanes of the interstate highway twice! He was really excited!

The crew came to pick up the unit a few weeks later. After their departure, my wife looked at the check and said, "God is so good! We gave our motor home freely, without any reservations or expectations of remuneration or reward. God used it to bless the Mahoney's ministry. He met our needs with the unlikely blessing of "Barney Bus". He used "Barney Bus" to start a disaster relief program for an entire Baptist convention. In our hearts, when we started, Barney was a donation; we never expected any profit, just "all bills paid". Now we find God has even reimbursed us for our gift to the Mahoneys. Honey, only God could orchestrate such wild program!"

Another lesson learned: frequently, God does not show us the entire picture, but He shows just enough to keep us on His course.

An illustration of this was the unit and the KNBC. After they got it home, they discovered it could be used between disasters as a support unit for their volunteer church builders. He gave them more than they bargained for...but, after all he is God!

Chapter 13

Mexico City Earthquake: Victory Out of Tragedy

On September 19, 1985, an earthquake hit Mexico City. It measured 8.1 on the open ended Richter scale, which is a severe earthquake! The International Mission Board lost contact with their missionaries in Mexico City and the surrounding area. They called Texas Baptist Men and asked if the TBM Aviation Fellowship could fly a Ham radio operator into the city to establish communications? I called Bill Parrott of Lindale, Texas and ask if he would take Rodney Baden, a Ham radio operator from Arlington, Texas, into Mexico City. They were eager to help. Bill confessed to me later that we sent him in too soon, because one of the after shocks was so strong he couldn't stand up. He told me that he grabbed a tree to keep from falling and the tree almost beat him to death, before he could turn it loose.

The Texas Baptist Convention had a partnership with the Baptist Convention of Mexico, which meant that any response to Baptist requests from Mexico would be led by Texas Baptists. The IMB called us and put us on stand by alert.

Bob Dixon said, "Johnny, the Mexican government says that they can handle their problems and that they don't need help, but you and I know that they will need help. When the people start to complain and riots break out, they will call for help. Mobile feeding units are what they are going to need. We better get ready to mobilize." Bob is so shrewd and such a creative thinker, that he was already thinking several steps ahead in the process. He called the IMB and told them what he was thinking. They said they had no requests from Mexico, but our BGCT Partnership Missions Director Bill Gray, had received a request from the Mexican Baptist Convention for help. The Holy Spirit continued to impress Bob that he was right and should proceed whether he had permission or not from the IMB and the Mexican government to go into Mexico. He issued the call to action to our 18 wheeler mobile kitchen crew, to those who would drive our support vehicles and set a launch time. He called the IMB again and they said we have no request from Mexico.

I received a call from the County Judge at Nacogdoches, Texas, Judge George Middlebrook, Jr., he said, "John, You know that because of my health I cannot go to Mexico with you, as much as I would like to go. Since I cannot go, I want to send my Bronco II with you. It has four wheel drive and winch on it, it might be very useful. I know I can't go, but my Bronco can." That was a very important telephone call! The Bronco II became our command car and performed an unusual function in setting up the operation.

As Bob and I were sitting across the conference table from each other, he said, "Johnny, we are going to launch this project on faith. It may put us ahead in a timetable to help Mexico, or it may be the biggest training exercise we have ever done. We are going to head for the Mexican border tomorrow." I alerted every prayer group that I had on my prayer list. It looked like I was going to spend another birthday in a foreign country. Every time we stopped between Dallas and San Antonio we called the office, to W.J. "Doc" Isbell, Bob's associate director.

Every time "Doc" said, "No word." Bob would hang up and say to me, "No word, we will just keep practicing."

When we arrived in Laredo, at the border, we bedded down for the night. Bob received a call from the IMB. They said, "At the request of the Mexican Government for a field kitchen, we now have permission to go into Mexico. How long will it take to get a crew together and launch the mobile kitchen?"

Bob said, "We already have the crew and equipment, we are rolling south." The IMB ask how far we were from the border. Bob replied, "We are in a motel about 200 yards from the border. We can cross in the morning."

We crossed into Mexico at 9:00a.m. in the next morning and had an immediately delay. All of the officials were not on duty yet. I recognized the pattern. God is as much in our delays as He is in our progress. He is a sovereign God! One of our crew, Ernie Liebig, led a young man to faith in Jesus as Savior. During our delay at the border, a Mexican Army sergeant was assigned to Disaster Relief Unit as an official escort. While riding in the Bronco, it was now our official command car, he accepted Jesus Christ as his personal savior. He was ordered to take us to Monterrey, but, he convinced his commanding officer to allow him to take us all the way to Mexico City. Manuel Galindo took that extra time to disciple him in his new faith.

All our equipment massed up together at the border made quite a bold impression on everyone crossing the border. The Lord got a lot of publicity out of the delaying. It also set the timing of our arrival at various locations along the way, for instance, I stopped to fill our tanks with propane, the manager arrived during the process and said, "You are helping our people and I will help you, no cost for the propane."

When we stopped for lunch the café owner refused our money and expressed gratitude for our helping his people. At dinner, we stopped at a restaurant, at the same time as one of the nationally acclaimed bull fighters, Luis Procura. He paid for our dinner and told us his son had a restaurant in Mexico City, which had been destroyed by the earthquake. He was grateful for our help. Things of this nature occurred all along the way. It was evident that our prayer cover was in place. Many times, in route, we were aware of God's protection.

We blew a radiator hose on the 18 wheeler mobile kitchen; there was no proper hose available in the next town. Bob Gilley acquired two short hoses and seven gallons of antifreeze. The parts house owner refused to accept payment. When Gilley returned to the rig, we began searching for a piece of pipe that would connect the two short hoses. Gilley discovered that one section of our telescoping radio antenna was the right diameter. He grabbed a hack saw, circumcised the antenna and connected the hoses.

There are always tourist warnings against driving in Mexico at night. We had an urgent request for help, so we pressed on South. Larry Peltz and I were taking turns driving the 18 wheeler. I was following a caravan of Mexican trucks about midnight, suddenly; everything disappeared in a cloud of dirt. It looked as if a dirt wall was in front of my windshield. I stuck my head out the window looking straight down trying to find the road, there was nothing there but a cloud of dirt. When I slowed down I switched to my parking lights because my headlights on the dust were blinding me. Through the dull glow of the yellow lights I could see the road. I crept along, until the dust began to clear and I could continue on with my headlights. We reached the other side of what was a construction zone and were back on the pavement. What had happened was, the black top ended at an unmarked construction zone and the Mexican truck ahead of me had stirred up the two or three inches of dust in the unpaved roadway. For a few moments of stark terror I was on instruments, as if flying in a fog. The only problem was the fact that there are no instruments in a truck! The Holy Spirit had to guide my hand in that blind

period to keep us out of the deep ravines on both sides of the two lane road. Evidently, each vehicle's taillights guided the other one through in our caravan.

The Mexican authorities in Mexico City did not understand we were a mobile kitchen, they thought we were a caravan of food trucks. They impounded our trucks in a warehouse complex. I discovered that these six warehouses were the ones where all the donated goods were being collected. I made up 6 teams with clipboards and told them to inventory every warehouse. In situations like this, it is better to know what they have and where it is stored, in order to make your requests of the government in an accurate way. This proved to be our salvation in some instances.

The next day we met Dr. Carlos Plancarte, who was the chief of the Social Protective Services (SPS). He was very gracious in his praise for our work. When he discovered we were a mobile feeding unit and not a grocery truck, he admitted he did not know where to put us.

Bob Dixon said, "Put us in the area where you have the greatest need. I see in the headlines of the newspaper that the Tepito area is where many people are in shelters needing help, and they are complaining."

Dr. Plancarte began to give us reasons why Tepito would not be a good area in which to serve. He referred to it as the "thieves market" and told us the police do not go in that area. Bob told him that if that is the greatest area of need, that is where we need to be. Dr. Plancarte replied, "OK, if you insist on going there, go! It is not a good place to go."

Our caravan left the warehouse district and proceeded toward Tepito. Devastation was everywhere! We passed one elementary school that had been a four story building. The building was now about eight feet tall and the four floors were stacked on top of each other, with six to eight inches between them. No child could have lived through it. It is impossible to describe the sights, smells, and sounds of earthquake damage. The sounds are the wailing cries of the bereaved as they claw through the debris looking for loved ones. If you have not been in an earthquake, no description would be sufficient

We pulled into the soccer field of the Tepito recreation center. The area was ringed with make shift shelters. We set up the kitchen and started cooking within an hour. The aroma of the food being prepared drew some people to ask what we were doing. When we told them that our purpose was to feed the refugees of Tepito; they began to spread the word. The people started lining up to eat and the line extended complete around the soccer field. We started serving an hour later and feed 2,000 meals every hour for the next four hours.

A small group of men approached me in the evening. This was the group I had been expecting. In every Mexican community, you may have elected officials and civic leaders, but the real power behind the organization of the community is the one referred to as "El Patron." There was a young man in front of the group and I knew right away that he was "El Patron". This was the man who was the de facto ruler of the area. He surveyed our mobile kitchen, all of it's equipment, the power generators, air compressor, and the stacks of food. He turned to me with a puzzled look on his face and ask, "What are you doing here?" I told him that we were Christians from America who had heard about their tragedy and suffering. I told him Baptist Christians sent us to feed the refugees until they could find a place to live.

He continued to look at me with question marks in his eyes and ask, "How much will this cost?"

I told him nothing. I informed him that it was a gift from Baptist Christians in America. He shook his head in disbelief and asked, "You will give us food free?"

I replied, "The food is free and we do it because we love you."

He stood up stretched tall and looked around with an air of authority and said, "The men of Tepito will guard your unit. You do not need to be afraid!"

The clean up crew finished their work, the kitchen crew laid out the food to use for breakfast and I sent the men to a hotel for the night. I stayed by myself and made it evident that I was alone, because I wanted the Patron to know that I trusted him to keep his word. After a while I noticed some men walking around the perimeter of the soccer field with machetes, baseball bats, nunchuckas, and other weapons. I crawled into the sleeper module on the tractor and started an all night prayer meeting. I thanked God for the safety of our trip, for His constant meeting of every need, and for the unusual security force with which He had surrounded me. I prayed for every team member and the family they left behind, for the ministry the Father laid out before us and for wisdom to meet every challenge with His resources.

At 2:00 a.m. I heard a car drive up by the cab. I rolled over and into the driver's seat, rolled down the window and there stood Dr. Plancarte on my tractor step.

He asked, "Where are your men?" I informed him they had been taken to a hotel for the night and that I was here alone with the kitchen.

He looked at me as if I had lost my mind and said, "This is Tepito! Don't you know where you are?"

I told him I knew where I was and instructed him to look around at my guardian angels. The men had stopped walking and were looking at him, holding their weapons. I waved and nodded that everything was OK. They resumed their stroll.

Plancarte asked, "Why are you doing this?"

I said, "Well, there are two basic reasons. First, your people are suffering and as Baptist Christian we want to minister to their needs. The second reason is I want you to look good."

Dr. Plancarte looked surprised and asked, "Why would you want to make me look good?"

I replied, "Nothing makes America feel safer than knowing that the country on her southern border has a people who are happy with their leaders."

Plancarte said with surprise, "You would do that? What do you need? I will see that you get it."

I said, "We need a flag to fly over our unit. He said that he didn't have an American flag or a Texas flag. I told him, "I didn't want either one of those. I want a Mexican flag. We are here at the invitation of the National Baptist Convention of Mexico." When federal officers delivered the flag the next day, I told them I did not know the protocol to handle their flag with honor and I ask them to put the flag on my antenna pole. They raised it to half mast in honor of the dead at my request.

The demand was so great for our services we had to request three other state disaster units to join us. Some of the units could only get into their service areas, because Judge Middlebrook's Bronco II, with its winch. We had to squeeze through narrow openings pull up posts and pull down fences with it.

My wife, Dr. L., and daughter, Lydia, joined me in early October in Tepito. My daughter, at 16 years old, was a master at childcare; she has a gift for tranquilizing excited children. The mothers in line for food were hesitant to be separated from their children because of their fear of more earthquakes. Lydia had the gift of gaining the mother's confidence and

organizing the children into family groups to which the mothers could bring the food. She did this from daylight to dark, seven days a week. The people of Tepito came to love her.

One day she asked if she could go into the market and look around, since she had only been at the unit working from daylight to dark. I let some of the ladies escort her into the Tepito market. When she returned a couple of hours later, she had several necklaces around her neck, bracelets, watches almost up to the elbow on both arms and a briefcase. I asked her where she got all of those things and she said, “Daddy, I didn’t spend any money. I didn’t buy anything. People in the market would stop me and put these things on me to express their appreciation for what I had done for their children!”

After my wife and daughter returned home, Lydia said to her mother, “You know Mom, when you see people hurting like this, you don’t really care who is elected homecoming queen or who is chosen as a cheerleader. This is what’s really important, isn’t it?” She understood the lesson God was teaching her as they walked together in a very broken place.

I asked Dr. Plancarte how long he expected to need us and he said about five years. We both chuckled. A month later I asked the same question and he replied, “Your grandchildren may bury you here.”

“I don’t have any grandchildren and my daughter is not even married!” I shot back.

He smiled and said, “She will have adequate opportunities in Mexico.”

“Dr. Plancarte, you do not need our trucks and equipment.” I explained, “You need our kitchens.”

He agreed, and I told him I would build four kitchens with adequate capacity in each one to replace a mobile kitchen from America. I told him I would build four complete kitchens, donate them to the Mexican Baptist Convention, and train the Baptist workers (Many of them had been working with us for weeks) to use them.

“Build five. I want one for the government.” He replied.

Dr. Lee Baggett, M.D., one of our missionaries, brought drafting materials to my hotel room and would not let me leave until I finished the drafts of the mobile kitchen...three days later. These plans became the basis for our airlift kitchens we built later. God does not waste a thing!

I told El Patron about the supplies and equipment I needed for the kitchens. He led me through the Tepito Market and located everything I needed. The problem with the gas burners was they were made for domestic use, not heavy duty commercial cooking with 20 to 30 gallon pots. I would need to practically remanufacture the stoves to generate the heat needed and to support the heavy loads of the large pots full of food. Dr. Plancarte obtained the use of a high school maintenance shop with welding and metal working equipment, and I went to work.

God is amazing! My father was a boilermaker who believed “every man ought to have a trade to fall back on in tough times”. All of the time we lived together, he was teaching me metal working skills. I overhauled my first gasoline motor when I was only twelve years old. I worked my way through high school in a foundry and machine shop. My junior year in high school, I built a car in my backyard. It was part Ford, Chevrolet, Buick, and La Salle. I called it my La Bufordolet...my neighbors had less respectful names for it. God put those skills to work in Mexico.

Several months before the earthquake, I had been visiting my mentor and father figure, Mr. Cecil Worley. He had owned the foundry and machine shop where I had worked. Cecil handed me an old homemade wooden tool box and told me he had kept it when he sold the business. It was the one I had used when I worked for him. It still contained a conglomeration

of old, but still useable, tools. When we loaded the mobile unit for the trip to Mexico, I saw it in my pickup truck and thought, "I'm going to take that with me so Mr. Worley can have a part in this mission." Little did I realize how much of a part he would have!

I had to resize the orifices for every stove and make the burner ports larger. This required drill bits measured in 32nds and 64ths. I found everything I needed in that old wooden box. God is good!

The kitchens work so well that Dr. Plancarte gave us permission to leave.

The day before we left the municipal authorities, the state authorities, and the federal government leaders gave a huge banquet to thank the Baptist for the work they did and to honor Mr. Jim Philpot, the Director of our Mexico City Baptist Mission. Everybody who was anybody in the government was there. The leaders were especially pleased to honor Jim.

The next morning, our last day in country, Jim and I met for breakfast and did a tour of the city paying bills. He ran out of checks and had to go back to the Mission Office. He told me to go to the rendezvous point and get the four mobile kitchens and their support vehicles ready to convoy out of town with a police escort.

When I arrived at the rendezvous point, one of the Mexico City missionaries came running toward the Bronco. He had tears streaming down his face and was sobbing so uncontrollably I could not understand him. Finally he was able to choke out the news, "Jim Philpot is dead. He was killed by a gunman when he came out of the Mission Office! Jim is dead, murdered!" Jim's death was such a tragedy and such a loss. We were all shocked.

Louisiana did not have its own tractor, so we contracted with a Mexican truck company to haul the Louisiana Unit back to the border. The driver did not understand all of his instructions. I signaled for the convoy to start rolling and the Mexican trucker took off like a rocket, passed everybody in line, and disappeared. The next time I saw their unit was in Laredo at the border.

We stopped on the north side of Mexico City, where the Philpots lived. I had to send three of my men with her to help identify the body. We were not able to restart the convoy until late in the evening. I called a meeting of the drivers and told them where we would spend the night. They told me they did not want to stop, because they had multiple drivers for every vehicle and would take turns driving.

The Lord was really in the timing of our return home. We reached Laredo, Texas the next evening. After we put everyone in a Motel, I ask Larry Blanchard to take charge of the Texas Units convoy, because the other state unit had already started home. I prepared to drive to Beaumont, Texas in the Bronco, because I was interim pastor of First Baptist Church.

Ernie Liebig said he wanted to get home and ask if I could drop him off at the airport in San Antonio. I slept in the back of the Bronco to San Antonio and then drove on to Beaumont. I arrived in Beaumont at 8:00 a.m. just in time to put on a suit and lead the 8:30 a.m. worship service.

The Holy Spirit's power was so intense in the services that he moved many people toward ministry. Because of those services that day, we received a \$87,000 motor home which was used as a disaster command post and a Cessna 180 bush plane for search and rescue. God's timing was perfect. It was a very good day.

Because of Jim's death, the Mexican officials were devastated. They expressed their deep sorrow to Jim's wife over his death and their deep regrets over her departure. Jim's wife, Juhree, told them that she and Jim had come to help the people of Mexico and that her calling

had not changed, that she would stay and finish the work they had started together. Her courage and commitment made a deep impression on all of the officials.

Because of the ministry of the Disaster Units in Mexico City, the death of Jim Philpot and his wife's commitment to stay in the ministry gave Baptist work in Mexico a tremendous surge. There were over 10,000 who accepted Christ as savior during the disaster work. Fourteen new churches have been started from that group of converts. The lesson I learned was to trust the scripture. God says in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into His plans." We have seen the benefit from the events that occurred. We trust the sovereignty of God to tell us the rest of the story and answer our "why" questions when we gather at His feet in the throne room.

Chapter 14

Walking With God as a Broken Person

This chapter is being written in the back seat of our family car as my wife drives me to my chemo-hormone injection and blood tests. The title of this book, “Walking With God in Broken Places”, has been rephrased for this chapter as, “Walking With God as a Broken Person”. And, believe me when I say, I did learn some lessons along the way!

I retired in March of 1999, nine months before I became 65. I retired to write this book. In April, my family doctor had scheduled my annual physical.

The physical went well. I have tried to live a healthy lifestyle and it was paying off. Except for a baby aspirin and vitamins, I was not taking any maintenance medicine. Everything was in the normal healthy range...except my PSA was a little high. The upper limit for a healthy prostate gland is four. My reading was 4.5. I thought that was okay, but needed to be monitored. My doctor told me that he was sending me to a urologist for further testing. His sense of urgency concerned me. I absolutely trusted his judgment because he had served as an intern under my son at Parkland Hospital in Dallas. My son insisted that I use him as my family physician because he said, “Dr. John English was the sharpest student I ever had.” My son is a perfectionist, so that said a lot.

Dr. Charles Dickson, M.D. was recommended. I discovered him to be a warm hearted Christian man who was an active witness for his faith. During his digital exam he commented that he hoped his prostate was as small as mine when he retired. He had prayer with me after the examination and said that everything seemed all right, but with the elevated PSA he would feel better if he had a biopsy of the area. He took seven tissue samples.

I left his office feeling confident that all was well. After all, I had led a healthy lifestyle, stayed in good physical condition, passed my commercial flight physical every year with no problem, and was generally in robust health. I was sure that I had additional Divine help because I had kept God’s precepts on sex and marriage. My wife was the only woman with whom I had ever had sex. We had followed the injunction that “True love waits”...and, WOW! It was worth the wait! We went on our honeymoon and never came home. We are still AWOL after 56 years.

The nurse’s call came at 7:30 am. “Dr. La Noue, five of the seven biopsies were positive for cancer. You will need to call Dr. Dickson for an appointment.” I do not remember any of the rest of the conversation, but, that was enough!

Since the Gleason score was above seven, we knew it was an aggressive type. A radical prostatectomy was recommended. I told Dr. K.P. Walker, who had been my physician and ministry partner for over 27 years, about my diagnoses and asked his advice. He yelled in the phone, “John, if it is cancer, GET IT OUT!”

If surgery was required, who was the best? With my son’s help, I met the head of the urology department where Dr Dickson had trained. His comment was, “Chuck Dickson was the best resident I ever had. He did everything right. He will treat you more conservatively than I would. You are in good hands.”

Armed with this information, I made all of the arrangements for the surgery to be done the next month. I even stored some of my own blood in the blood bank just in case it might be needed.

Then I went home...to pout.

I had done everything I could to live for Jesus since I was converted during my sixteenth year. Why was this happening to me just as I retired and was preparing for a new phase of ministry to which God had called me?

But, I discovered no one likes a pity party and those who do come never bring refreshments. I was depressed.

My thoughts turned to my wife of 45 years, and my family. There were so many times when we were apart due to ministry assignments. When I thought of this, I had a flash of anger, a feeling of being cheated out of precious family time. That was time which I would not have an opportunity to reclaim.

Then, I remembered...this life is not about me...or us...but it is about Him! I remembered that every moment Dr. L and I have had together has been a gift from God. I did not deserve a one of them. We should not grieve over the short time we have been together (45 years seemed so short when we were having so much fun...you never want it to end). Instead, we must be grateful and praise God for the time we have had together! We did not deserve one second of such ecstatic grace from God, but, He freely blessed us when He blessed us with each other! The love song which we have sung together, now for over a half century, says:

God gave to the wise men their wisdom,
To the poets, their hopes and their dreams.
To dad and mother, He gave each other.
Not a soul was left out, so it seems.

Now I thought that I'd been forgotten,
That life was an empty affair.
But when God gave me you,
It was then that I knew
That I'd gotten more than my share!

I had the surgery, but the cancer had started to move. My doctor tried to remove the tissue in a wide margin, hoping to get it all.

Later, I was still learning God's lessons.

I was five months into the cancer treatment, waiting to see if the surgery was successful or would the PSA count go up again, indicating the cancer was still active.

The headlights of my life, which were always focused on the future, were too dim to see where I was going. So, I took time to look in the rearview mirror. This type of reflection was new to me, because I had spent my entire Christian life eagerly finishing one ministry and looking forward to the next assignment.

As I looked back, I realized I had lived three lives already: one as a pastor, one as a minister to students in college, and one as a denominational worker for the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Baptist Sunday School Board (Lifeway Christian Resources). The ministry activity and results from any one of these would have satisfied me as a life well spent. But, God's grace had blessed me in triplicate!

The cancer count started up again indicating the need for radiation. After 33 radiation treatments, it started up again. The cancer was still somewhere in my body and it was still

active. The next step was the chemo-hormone injections. This treatment would not kill the cancer, but starve it into a dormant state. The cancer is still there, but it is hibernating.

When I realized the facts of my situation, I began to think of it as a race. How much can I accomplish for the Lord before this rascal wakes up and begins its deadly work? I committed my life to the running of the race as in Hebrews 12:1-3, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." NIV.

I decided:

The race is not endless.

The time to run is not without limits.

A finish line has been drawn in my life.

No time left:

To waste

To change lanes

To run sideways or backward

To run slowly and wave at the crowd

To run circles around the slower ones,

Or,

To run in the crowd of the mediocre.

The part of the race behind me cannot be re-run.

I can only run what is left of the race which is before me.

So,

It is time to run like Hell is hot on my heels

And Heaven's open door is before me.

To run with purpose and power.

To run in a way that uses my gifts from God,

My resources,

My experience,

And

My skills to the maximum!

To run without yielding to distractions.

To run and not be deterred by any relationship,

But, to be spurred on by my relationship with Jesus.

To run so that when the race is over,

My past will benefit the future of others.

To run in such a way that the spectators will not say.

"What a runner!"

But, they will say,

"What a Race!"

It has been eleven years of injections and cancer management, and still the beast sleeps. Meanwhile I have been active in disaster relief, nationally and internationally. I have worked in North Korea enough to be called Grandfather John. We spent three months working 9/11/01 in

New York. I have worked the Tsunami in Sri Lanka, the Bam earthquake in Iran, refugee work in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, and a lot of other ministries that have kept me from writing this book that I retired to write eleven years ago.

I had my 76th birthday in September, 2010 and took the day off from building my wife a house that she has wanted for years. It is a house on a hill with 355 degrees of uncluttered horizon. It has a clear view of gorgeous sunrises and sunsets, and it overlooks our hangar and runway.

I tried growing old gracefully, but it did not work.

Lessons learned along the way were many and I am still learning. Some are:

Do not ask God, "why?" Know that Romans 8:28 covers the situation, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." NIV.

Ask God, "How". He gives us light for our path, but the light may be like auto headlights. They only give enough light to drive safely. They do not light up the entire road to your destination all at once. There have been occasions when I had to pray for enough light to guide my uplifted foot.

Life is not about me and mine, but, it is about Him and His.

Learn to look Death in the face and live unafraid. Remember he is under God's orders and think of him as a conductor who will bring you into God's presence.

Being made aware of your mortality will make you reorder your priorities.

Ask God to make you aware of the lessons to be learned which are contained in the event in which you are involved.

You learn what has true value. Things have no permanent value, but relationships do. Treasure every moment with those you love, especially treasure your relationship with Jesus.

Nuf sed!

Chapter 15

Peru: Cholera Epidemic Two Ministries from One Disaster

One of the amazing aspects of walking with God is how He links his ministry activities to each other, like links in a chain. This requires you to be very sensitive to His will or you might miss a link and break the chain of ministries in which He has invited you to participate.

This chapter is an illustration of this fact. It starts with a HAM radio call from a missionary in Peru and leads to a ministry in the mountains of Iran.

The Texas Baptist Men staff was gathered in our conference room having lunch when the telephone rang. Being the closest to it, I answered it. The call was from a member of the TBM Communications Committee (our group of HAM radio operators who help in disaster relief and other projects). He was a contractor who was talking to a missionary in Peru on his portable radio.

He told us to get on the air with our TBM HAM station and monitor his contact. A missionary in Caja Marca, Peru was describing the terrible cholera epidemic in his area. People were dying before they could get to a clinic, they were running out of medicine, and the people were in a state of panic fearing infection. The frantic call of another missionary's wife to her father, asking for prayer that her children would be spared in this epidemic, broke our hearts.

Bob Dixon, my boss, called us to prayer immediately. After our prayer time, Bob looked at me and said, "Johnny, what do you think? Is this God's invitation for us to join Him in His work?"

I replied, "Bob we have no budget for this, I cannot even spell the names of the medications that were requested, I have no idea of where to find them, or how to get them to a place in Peru that I have never seen on a map. The call came to us from a guy playing with his portable HAM radio on his lunch break. There are a lot of relief agencies who could handle this better than we can. Bob, only God would pull a stunt like this to see if we are really willing to get out of our boat and walk on the water in faith. This is for us. We better get after it!"

Since my step brother was with Upjohn Pharmaceutical Company, I volunteered to start calling drug companies. Bob told me to wait while he made a call to our Human Welfare Department. This department related to all of the Baptist hospitals in Texas, and he felt the various hospital administrators could help through their vendors. He called and the secretary said that the director was not in. When Bob asked where he was, she said, "He is in the first floor in a conference with the all of the administrators of our Texas Baptist hospitals."

Bob, being a bird hunter, covered the phone with his hand and said, "Johnny, we have them in a covey!"

Bob interrupted their meeting, explained the situation, and asked their help. And, did they ever help! In a few days we had 450,000 pounds of medicine and IV fluids!

Trying to move it to Peru was the next problem. There were no funds for transportation. I began calling every airline that flew to Peru. Because of the emergency, some would transport 100 to 600 pounds without charging us for freight. But, I needed to transport 450,000 pounds! At that rate, it would take months for the transport.

In a radio call, the missionary was informed of the problem. He calculated the Peruvian production of medicine and fluid, the projected needs per day, and helped us develop an alternate

plan. If we could ship 150,000 pounds by air, it would hold the situation in check until the rest of it came by sea freight.

I remembered that the military had some assignment to respond to disasters, so. I called the Pentagon. I was bounced around from person to person, until I was in the right department. A sharp commanding voice asked, "Who are you and what do you want. Go!" My reply was, "I am Dr. John La Noue with Texas Baptist Men. We are trying to get medicine to Peru to help fight cholera."

He said, "We cannot help you." This was followed by what sounded like a chuckle as he hung up. My feeling was that I had annoyed the person with my ridiculous request.

I continued to pray. I seem to pray best when I am out of options or my feet are in the fire.

My phone started to ring as I prayed. It was one of our men from Longview, Texas, Dr. Ken Dupuy. Ken had been Deputy Director of the Budget in the Nixon Whitehouse.

He asked, "What are we doing to meet the needs in Peru?" I explained everything to him and told him about my logistical problem. He told me to call the Pentagon. When I told him that I had, he asked about their response? I said, "They laughed and hung up."

Ken's voice changed to a low, strong, authoritative tone, "Get a pencil and paper. Write down every word I say, do not change it, or modify it in any way." As I wrote he said, "Dear George, you and I worked together so well in the past, especially on the energy crisis of 1973. I know your heart and that you are a great humanitarian. You have an opportunity to be a tremendous help to the cholera victims in Peru.

Our group, Texas Baptist Men, has collected thousands of pounds of medicine. We need the U.S. military to transport it to Peru. If you can help us, contact Dr. John La Noue at TBM. Phone: 214-828-5354.

Thank You.

Sincerely,

Ken"

He followed this with a fax number.

I asked, "To George who?"

He snapped back, "George Bush, the President. Use that fax number once and destroy it. Never use it again. It is the fax in the Oval Office."

"Shouldn't I put your last name on the fax?" I asked.

Ken said, "You do not need to."

The next morning the Pentagon called asking where I needed the plane to pick up the cargo. When I told them San Antonio, they said they would make several stops to pick up additional cargo from other groups before coming to San Antonio. I told them we had 150,000 pounds of cargo in San Antonio. They replied, "You could not have that much! We have investigated you. You are a small organization and there is no way you could have that much medicine! Don't you lie to me?"

I replied, "Sir, we have 450,000 pounds and I am only shipping 150,000 with you. I am sending 300,000 by ocean freight. You better pick up our load first." He told me that if I was lying, I would be in a lot of trouble.

He called me several days later and shouted in the phone, "You lied to me! You had 175,000 pounds, not 150,000. We had to refuel in flight." I apologized and said, "I am sorry. Peru asked for chlorine to purify water. I bought 25,000 pounds. I just forgot to tell you." He

was so impressed that it led to another story...but, I must tell you how God was glorified in this ministry.

First, I think the Pentagon was impressed with what a few religious people could do when people were hurting. This was evident from their requests to us later, when they had a need.

Secondly, the response in Peru was overwhelming! They did not have machinery to offload K pallets, so everything had to be unloaded by manpower. Their military turned out to do it. The crowd of workers and the mountain of supplies made national TV, radio programs, magazine, and newspaper coverage. The missionaries were astounded as everyone responded to the aid from "Las Bautistas". This set the cause of Christ way ahead and validated the work of the missionaries.

In December of that year, TBM had a visit from the Vice President of Peru. He thanked us for our help to his country and said TBM had done more to help them than all of the other aid agencies put together. He told us of the surplus they were able to share with Ecuador when the epidemic crossed the border into their country.

We knew of the Ecuadorian problem because we had put clinic building crews into that country to help with the cholera epidemic there. However, we did not know about the gift of medicine.

All of this occurred at the end of Desert Storm. The lack of U.S. casualties was the reason for the large stock of medicine and IV fluids being available. The manufacturers had geared up production for the war.

Just as our Peruvian project ended, Saddam Hussein turned from battling the UN coalition forces and began attacking the Kurds in northern Iraq. The Kurds saw that the UN forces had stopped advancing and would not depose Saddam, so, they attacked from the north. Before the partitioning of that area, it was Kurdistan. Sections of Kurdistan were given to Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran.

The slaughter of the Kurds was everywhere in the news. Poison gas, strafing fleeing crowds, poisoning streams, and many other atrocities were committed against them. They were fleeing to the mountains in rain and snow. The old and the sick people were dying from exposure. The Kurds in Dallas were picketing in down town with signs carrying pictures of their people's plight, and chanting, "Christian America how can you let these things happen and do nothing! Where is your Bible? Don't you believe it? Help our people!"

TBM had no idea of how to help, but we did know how to pray. And we did!

In God's orchestration of His work, He had begun my preparation three years in advance. Our church, The Fielder Road Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, had been asked by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to pray for the Kurdish people. I had no idea who they were. All I knew was they were an unreached people group in the Middle East. My wife, a church staff member, and I put them on our prayer list. We had been praying for the Kurds for three years.

The voice and its manner sounded very familiar. It was my contact at the Pentagon! He began, "Dr. La Noue, I know your heart. You are a real humanitarian. It was great to work with you on the Peru Project. I am calling to offer you an opportunity to join us in a very important project. No doubt you have heard of the Kurdish problem. Our President Bush has authorized us to start a project called Desert Comfort to help them. Will you join us?"

I was stunned to hear from him, to hear the language of Dr. Dupuy's letter to the President repeated to me, and to be asked to assist in such a great ministry was a direct answer to prayer.

I responded, "This is an enormous task. What would you need from us?"

He replied, "Blankets, we need lots of warm blankets. We plan to drop them to the Kurds in the mountains by helicopter. Will you help?"

When I told him he needed to talk to my supervisor, he said, "No. I have worked with you. I trust you. And, I do not want too many names on the table."

I told him to call back in the morning because we had to pray about it, and he would have an answer.

The staff was having a mid-morning coffee break in the conference room. I sat down and said, "Bob, I just got a call from our contact at the Pentagon. He wants us to help the Kurds in Iraq with blankets as a part of President Bush's Desert Comfort project. What do you think?"

"I do not know what to do, Johnny. Let's pray." He said.

We did. We prayed until noon. I told him that I had been praying for the Kurds for three years and I suspected God was up to something.

"I sense God's leadership in this. Where can we find blankets, Johnny? Bob asked.

After thinking a bit I remembered a blanket factory in North Carolina that I passed every time I went to the Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center. I replied, "Bob, the only factory I know is the Beacon Blanket Company in Swannanoa, North Carolina."

"I wonder where Elmin Howell, in River Ministry, gets the blankets he distributes along the Texas-Mexican border?" Bob mused. He told me Elmin would be in the luncheon meeting he was attending, and I needed to clear my desk for action when he returned.

After Bob returned from lunch, he said, "Johnny, Elmin said he used the Beacon Blanket Company and gave me their phone number. God is all over this! Let's get going!"

Before quitting time, if there is such a thing in ministry, Bob had gotten the blanket company to sell us every blanket in stock for the cost of only the material, \$48,000.00 worth, enough to fill three tractor trailer rigs. He had contacted North Carolina Baptist Men for their help in labeling every blanket and every box, telling the recipients that this was a gift from the Baptist Christians in America. When Bob was convinced of God's will in a ministry, he was a Tennessee Tornado in moving into it.

When the Pentagon called the next morning, I convinced our contact to talk to Bob and to cut me out of the loop. He asked Bob for our decision. Bob, who was always double tasking, was opening mail while taking the call. "Mr. Dixon, will TBM help us?" asked the contact. When Bob told him yes, and that we had already ordered three eighteen wheelers full, in a startled voice the person asked, "How much did it cost?" Bob told him it was \$48,000, and he responded, "How did you do that? We have checked out your organization. You are a small religious group with a small budget. How can you afford that much of unbudgeted expense?"

As the man was asking these questions, Bob opened a letter and a check for \$4,800 slid out on the desk. In the "for" blank on the check it said, "For anything God leads you to do today." Bob's reply to the queries was, "We did not have the money, but the Heavenly Father told us to do it. He sent ten percent of it in today's mail. I'm sure He will send the rest as needed. If you need more blankets, just let us know." There was silence on the line, then the man said, "Thank you," and hung up.

Baptist Press picked up the story and we began to get calls from everywhere, even North Dakota, asking where to send donated blankets. We received a call from the Pentagon telling us to stop our appeal for blankets because Andrews Air Force Base had trucks filled with blankets lined up to the gate.

Little did we know that all we had seen was only an introduction to a ministry with the Kurds. The Kurds were only permitted to cross one border in their flight for refuge, the Iranian border. God was about to open Iran to us. Iran, this is a place where no Americans had been for thirteen years.

I mentioned the request for our church to pray for the Kurds. It came from a missionary assigned to work with the Kurds. Since he could not serve in Iraq, he was working with the Kurds in England. He was Mike Stroop. Mike had been one of TBM's Royal Ambassador High School summer staffers. Now, years later, he was serving an unreached people group. Perhaps I should explain that an "unreached people group" is an ethnic group where the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the Son of God has not been introduced.

The Kurds heard about Jesus from the Koran, where he is called a prophet of Allah. They had not been introduced to Jesus as the Son of God.

Mike saw the Kurdish flight into Iran and realized Iran had no facilities to care for the refugees. He prayed for a plan, an opening, to get into the refugees while the emergency was in progress. The problem was the U.S. had no diplomatic relations with Iran. After their revolution and deposing the Shah, they held our Embassy personnel hostages for 444 days. Later, the U.S. accidentally shot down one of their airliners loaded with pilgrims going to Mecca. They hated us.

Mike called Bob Dixon and said, "Bob' I am on my way to the Iranian Embassy in London to introduce myself as a representative of Global Partners, an international humanitarian aid organization. What can I promise them that we can deliver? I do not want to embarrass Jesus by saying too much."

Bob told him that we had airlift kitchens, water purifiers, and medical clinic resources through our Medical and Dental Fellowship. Mike went to a quick print office, I think, and printed letterhead and business cards.

He presented himself as the Global Partners representative in England. They said they had never heard of the group. Mike persisted, saying there were 14,000,000 people as their backers (that was the total of Southern Baptists at the time). When he offered mobile kitchens, water purifiers, and a medical clinic, they could not resist.

It took two days to get approval for the group to serve in Iran. God was working in a powerful and miraculous way! Mike Stroop called our TBM office from London and told us he had permission to bring three mobile kitchens and twelve workers. Bob turned to me and said, "Johnny, find twelve men to staff these crews and work out the logistics to transport them and the equipment to Iran."

My thoughts were, where would I find twelve men to go into a country where the last Americans there spent 444 days as hostages? Where will I find twelve men whose wives will let them go to a country where they might be held hostage, expelled, or killed?

I expressed these thoughts to Bob and he said, "God is in this. We are to help these people. Talk to the Father about it." I did. The first eleven men whom I called, or who called me as volunteers, said they were willing and ready. I was at my desk looking for the twelfth man, when Dixon stuck his head in the door and asked, "How many do you have?" I told him eleven and he said, "Ok, Johnny, you go as number twelve and lead the group."

"Yes, sir," I replied.

Wow! Out of the prayer room and operation center, and into the battle field!

I had to be reassured by the Father that this was an assignment from Him and not an impulsive assignment made on the basis of need. I learned a lesson long ago that apparent need

does not constitute a calling of God to personally meet that need. A person could have a fragmented and ineffective life responding to every need that arose. We need to be directed by God in our assignments.

Another lesson that I shall repeat many times in this book is to always be certain of God's leadership in an event. I have learned Satan will often tempt you to do something that looks good in order to keep you from doing what is best. As I have said, if he cannot keep you from living the Christlife, he will try to get you off the true course as many degrees as he can. That is why the good can become the enemy of the best.

As I prayed, asking the Lord for His leadership and assurance, I asked for a scripture on which I could lean during this operation. Immediately, I was directed to Psalm 91. My daily Bible study was not in this section of the Scripture, nor was it in my Sunday message preparation. It was a clear message in my head, "Read Psalm 91!"

I was obedient to the message!

It is the warrior's Psalm. It is packed with reassurance for the one who walks with God on the battlefield.

My thoughts were of my wife, Dr. L, as I walked into our home, how was I going to break the news to her? Our daughter was planning her wedding, our son was a third year medical student doing a medical rotation in Zimbabwe, and, now her husband was going to Iran

She met me at the door with her wonderfully warm embrace and lingering kiss, after all we had only been married 37 years and the excitement of it all had not dimmed in the least. We hold no secrets and we communicate freely, so, I told her, "Honey God is sending me to Iran."

She replied, "I know, Darling."

My surprised question was, "Who told you? I just discovered it today!"

"God told me last week." She replied.

To reassure her, I said, "God gave me a scripture for the trip. It is...

"Psalm 91," She interrupted. "He gave me that also last week! I have begun to memorize it so I can pray through it every day you are gone and claim its promises for you." I must confess my sinful envy, at this point. One of my desires is to be so close to God that He will tell me something before He tells her. Evidently I am not there yet.

A tornado of activity began at the TBM office and the BGCT basement parking area. We had one airlift kitchen, but we needed three. We needed to redesign it and build others to fit the peculiar needs of a desert or mountainous area. We needed three trailer mounted water purifiers with diesel engines. A company had tried to sell us one the month before, we had never used one before, and they were \$25,000 each. I told them we did not need one, and sent them away. However, they insisted on leaving me a demonstration video and brochures. I tossed them on my overloaded desk. When I say, "overloaded desk", I really mean it. As a matter of fact, I asked my secretary to help me clean it one day and she replied, "Oh, I would love to! I just love archaeology!"

The company was shocked by my order of three \$25,000 units. They promised delivery in a week. I did not know that the only unit they had ever produced was the one demonstration unit in the video.

I went to the "factory", a large garage with a small office in the corner, every day to monitor their progress and to be sure we were getting our money's worth in quality. They kept their word to ship them in a week, but they were not completely ready. Some of the workers put their tools on the shipping trailer and worked on them while they were in transit to South Bend, Indiana.

The work of the Holy Spirit was evident in our planning. We spent hours in prayer. We prayed for His guidance in preparation for circumstances we had never experienced, for answers to question yet to be asked, for solutions to problems before they arose, and for wisdom.

An example of the type of details, to which we had to pay attention, would be the trailer hitches on the trailer borne water purifiers. They were standard two inch ball hitches. Will the trucks or cars in Iran have this type? What if theirs is metric? Do they use the pindle hitch, which is a steel ring welded to the trailer tongue that fits into a clamp on the bumper of the towing vehicle? Or, will they have any hitch at all? We devised a 12 inch piece of channel steel, with a bolt hole in one end, a ball hitch in the middle, and a pindle ring on the end. The ball could be inserted in the hitch, bolted to the tongue, leaving the pindle ring firmly attached in front. If there was no hitch at all on the vehicle, a piece of chain could be wrapped around the bumper, and fastened through the pindle ring with a bolt.

The same type of problems were faced with the propane systems, water storage systems, electrical systems, and collecting every imaginable tool needed to modify all of the systems to meet unknown needs, or circumstances.

Looking at the project with hindsight, it was amazing how we used everything we took and met every challenge. God provided things in Iran that expanded and benefited the ministry in an unusual way that only could be credited to Him!

The kitchen preparation was being done simultaneously with the preparations for the crew. They needed to be prepared for mountain camping with food, clothing, and shelter. Mountaineering gear was also taken in case we had to exit the country on foot through the Zagros Mountains. I am a basic mountaineering instructor and several in our group were camp craft instructors. Two of the men were experienced mountain guides. This equipment was kept in a separate duffle bag which I kept with me. I have a fascination with maps. Everywhere I go, I insist on having several types of maps that cover the same territory. I use aviation charts (Both Sectional and World Aeronautical Charts), atlas and National Geographic maps, nautical charts, ONC, and JOG charts also. In countries that are unfriendly, where maps might be considered espionage, I memorize the needed data and leave the maps outside the country. This was the case with Iran.

One huge problem for us was dietary information about the Kurds. What was their staple diet? Are there any dietary taboos? What spices do they use? How much food do they expect for a meal? What is the simplest meal to prepare in the quickest way to save on fuel use and feed the most people at the same time?

For answers, we turned to the Kurdish demonstrators who had gathered in front of the courthouse. They directed us to a Kurdish restaurant owner. He was also the leader of the Dallas Kurdish community.

When the Dallas Kurds heard about our mission, they sent a delegation to our office. They insisted we take one of their young men as an interpreter. His name was Mafa Barzani. He was the nephew of the leader of the Kurds in northern Iraq. He was fluent in English, German, Arabic, Farsi, and several dialects of the Kurd's languages. He was a taxi driver at the DFW Airport and a goldmine of assistance to our project. But, he was a Muslim.

In my experience, being short handed on personnel and resources is not nearly as detrimental as having a team member who is not spiritually, attitudinally, and morally up to the challenge. So, I said that I could not take him. That created a minor riot in the conference room! I finally got them quiet again and answered their question as to why not.

"He is Muslim and this is a Christian group." I said.

“What has that GOT TO DO WITH IT?” Mafa shouted!

I explained to the group that Christians conduct themselves in a different manner in certain circumstances. I told them, “If someone curses us, we smile. If someone spits in our face, we smile and walk on.”

Mafa was staring at the floor, contemplating my comments. He replied, “I will do anything to help my people.”

I continued, “Mafa, if someone slaps our face, we turn the other cheek.”

His struggle was evident when he looked up at me, with perspiration streaming down his face, and stated with affirmation, “I will do ANYTHING to help my people!”

I told him there was one more essential requirement, “Mafa we Christians pray often and about everything. You must join us in our prayer meetings. You may pray to Allah or anybody else, but you must join us in our prayer time and stay with us until we finish.”

He gave me a stern look and replied, “Dr. La Noue, I WILL DO ANYTHING TO HELP MY PEOPLE!”

I asked the group if Mafa was a man of his word and if he was a man who was absolutely trustworthy? They all swore that he was. I trusted them. Mafa was a tremendous blessing!

Rather than give you our technical list of all of the equipment preparation, just think of everything we were taking and imagine backup systems, modifications to make things work with European and Oriental plumbing and electricity, and stocks of copper and rubber tubing with fittings in case we had to build new systems.

We prayed a lot!

All of this had to be organized, inventoried, crated, labeled with a crate manifest, and transported. Transported? That was a real problem. No airline or charter company would touch a cargo for Iran.

We really prayed a lot! God intervened in a magnificent way, a way that would bring glory to Him and Him alone. Two years before this event, Dr. Lester E. Sumerall, an Assembly of God evangelist, came out of the prayer room in his South Bend, Indiana, office and said, “While I was in there praying, God told me to buy a Hercules. What is that?”

One of his staff, a former Air Force fighter pilot, said, “That is a C130 military cargo plane.”

Lester asked, “How many motors?”

“Four,” Said the pilot.

“Will it haul a lot of food to hungry people?” Lester queried. When the pilot gave an affirmative answer, Lester told him to go buy one.

The LESEA Ministries organization found one in Florida, an A model C130. It had belonged to a South American country and ownership had been transferred because of a mechanic’s lien. It took an act of congress, I was told, to get it released to a nonprofit organization. I believe it cost \$1,200,000. That was an amazing commitment to fighting world hunger by an evangelistic association.

The plan for transportation called for the freight to be loaded at the LESEA hangar in South Bend and airlifted to Stanstead Airport near London, England. The crew was divided into two groups and each group was to travel to London by commercial airlines several days apart. The first flight was to leave from Dallas, the other group, led by retired Marine Lt. Col. Jim Furgerson, would leave later from Atlanta, GA. Jim was the Disaster Relief Director for the Brotherhood Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. One of the members of Jim’s crew was retired Air Force Colonel, Cal Jones. Both men were Viet Nam veterans. Another

member of his group was a retired Air Force navigator, Warren Hart. I felt it was best to put the veterans together in case Iran had a problem with their military histories.

My group traveled first, and were forced to spend the night in Cincinnati, Ohio, because of bad weather. We spent the extra night in prayer. During the night, God gave us reassurance in the scripture. In the margin of my travel Bible, you will find the notation, "Iran 5/9/91," beside II Chronicles 16:9a, "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him." NIV.

We arrived in London several days before the second group and met with a group of thirty people who were working with Iranians in and out of Iran. No one used their real names for fear of discovery in case there was an agent from Iran in the group. They helped us with Iranian customs, ways to work with Iranian bureaucrats, and many other things. I believe our Kurdish Muslim interpreter made some feel uneasy.

After the rest of the team arrived, we went to the Iranian Embassy to get our visas. There was an air of panic in the embassy when twelve Americans and one Kurd walked in. It had been thirteen years since a group of Americans applied for visas. I explained to the officials our mission and advised them of the agreement with Global Partners.

There were some hurried conversations in Farsi among the officials. Finally, one stammered, "It will be at least twenty-one days before we can do this!"

I explained that there was an urgency to meet the Kurdish refugee emergency and that we could not wait twenty-one days. They repeated their decision.

We went to the street in front of the embassy. Standing on the sidewalk, I called the group to circle up for a prayer meeting. It must have been quite a sight to the embassy personnel to see thirteen men form a huddle, with their arms around each other's shoulders, bowing their heads for prayer in front of their building.

Mafa pushed his ball cap to the back of his head, and as he bowed his head for our prayer, I heard him mutter to himself, "My grandfather was killed when my father was three years old. My father was killed when I was six years old. It is always a Barzani butt that gets the first bullet and this is a dangerous action in this place!"

When the prayer was complete, I told the men to wait in the foyer while I spoke to the officials again. I asked them to keep praying while I met with the officials. "Let's see what God has done in answer to our prayer." I said.

The officials said that it takes time to do these things and it would take at least ten days to get visas. I reminded him of the urgency of our mission for his government's problem.

I took the group back to the sidewalk for another prayer and told them the last prayer request had cut eleven days off the first schedule.

The group kept praying on the sidewalk while I returned to the visa desk and repeated my request. This time a frustrated official said, "I have told you that this takes time! There is no way we can issue these visas before ten...o'clock... in the morning!"

I thanked him profusely! And, appeared to walk out calmly...however, I am a Baptistical and though my hands were by my side, I had both hands held high in my heart in praise to God!

We got our visas and planned our departure. It was decided that we would take one team and half the cargo on each flight. I made this decision for two reasons. First, the plane would not be up to its gross weight limit on the first flight into the unknown airport at Larnaca, Cyprus. Secondly, if we or the aircraft were disabled in some way, Jim Furgerson could still accomplish the mission with his crew and a British charter flight.

All of these decisions were made after hours of prayer. Our delay in London was used as a time of prayer. Some did a little sightseeing, but we spent most of our time in prayer. When you know that your very life is on the line, it is a strong incentive to pray.

God had given me Psalm 91 as His promise for the mission. In that Psalm, verse 11 says, “For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”(NIV) With this promise in mind, I prayed for God to give me a guardian angel who was familiar and experienced in the area of our mission. If this seems strange to some of you who have not had this experience, do not freak out at this point, just hang with me and check it out in the Bible. The book of the prophet Daniel mentions evil spirits who are over some countries. I told you earlier that I was one of those mystical idiots who really believed that Jesus really meant what He said. Well, let me expand that to include the entire Word of God!

If the odds of coming out of a mission alive are fifty-fifty, you learn to absolutely depend on the truth of the Scripture. I always do a risk assessment of a mission, but risk is not the determining factor in whether or not I go. Is it the will of God for me? That is the determining factor. He always backs up the assignment with assurance from His Word. I cling to that Scripture and claim His promises throughout the mission.

A hard lesson to learn is there are times when your chances may be less than even to come back. You must realize that your life is not about you, but it is about Him. You must understand that your death may be more important than your life.

Jesus taught me that.

Back to my prayer for an angel, a strange thing happened. Every time I closed my eyes in prayer I would be aware of scene in my mind, almost like a photo, or a video clip. I would see myself in my posture for prayer, whatever it was at the time, and standing behind me, but towering over me was this powerful being. He had a very dark complexion, powerful arms, a huge sword by his side, and very strange trousers. They were tight at the ankles, enormously blousy or baggy from the waist to the ankles, tight at the waist, with a sash around the waist. His arms were crossed and he was always smiling as I prayed. He was so large and dark that I referred to him in my journal as my BBGA, **my** Big Black Guardian Angel.

We loaded our plane the day after our visas were in hand. The group used the former RAF Airfield, Stanstead Airport, which was now a general aviation facility, rather than the busy commercial airport, Heathrow.

Our group of seven loaded their personal gear, their mountain camping gear, two of the trailer mounted water purifiers, and two of the three airlift kitchens. The weather was cool in London and we were flying to a Mediterranean island where the climate was moderate, but, I told my team to dress for winter weather. The reason was we would be flying in the cargo bay of C130A, which I suspected was unheated. Since the aircraft was turbine powered, but not pressurized, I estimated that air traffic control would assign us a cruising altitude would be between 10,500 and 12,500 feet. That altitude was better for engine economy but not high enough to require oxygen for the passengers and crew. The temperature normally drops 3.5 degrees Fahrenheit for every 1,000 feet of altitude. There was the probability that it would be almost 44 degrees colder at our cruising altitude than at sea level. If the temperature was in the 60's in London, it could be in the 20's or lower at that altitude.

I explained all of that to give you some idea of the details and constant planning that is necessary for these ministry trips. It is extremely important to remain more than flexible, you must be fluid! You may go to sleep at night with everything in order for meeting tomorrow's

challenges and wake up with the whole plan scrapped because the situation has changed radically. Taking time to gripe, get frustrated or be critical of the situation and/or people is wasted time. Time is a precious resource; do not waste it. It is better to invest a lot of it in prayer. After all, God is never surprised...He has an answer.

The aircraft did have a cargo bay heater. If you held your hand over your head, you could feel warm air blowing on it, but my water bottle sitting on the floor had ice forming in it. It is not unusual to be right and wrong at the same time. Remember: fluid. The aircraft seats were canvas webbing suspended from the wall of the fuselage. You sat with your back against the wall facing the cargo. There were windows, like portholes, spaced down the sides of the aircraft.

The takeoff and climb to altitude over England was quite a sight and, especially for me a World War II buff.

The flight was uneventful until we crossed the island of Crete. I was reading my Bible when I heard an engine go out of synchronization with the other three. I have been flying for 37 years, 26 years as a licensed commercial pilot, and I knew that meant trouble. I felt the plane yaw slightly to the left. To me that signaled a loss of power in one of the two left engines. My crew shouted questions to each other asking what happened. I shouted over the noise that we had lost an engine.

“What shall we do?” one asked.

I asked what he was doing when we lost the engine. He replied, “I was reading my Bible and praying.”

“Sounds like a good idea. Keep it up!” I shouted.

I looked out of my window and saw the inboard engine’s propeller had been feathered and was dead still. When I thought the excitement in the cockpit had settled down, I climbed up on the flight deck and asked the copilot, who was the crew manager from LESEA, what happened? He reassured me that we were in a safe flight mode due to the partial load we carried. (God is so good!) He said, “The bad news is that was our best engine! It has a lower service time than the other three.” He was a retired jet fighter pilot from the Viet Nam war and an Assembly of God pastor. The pilot was a mercenary pilot who had been flying for various national military groups.

A hydraulic line broke on landing. The fluid was running down into the belly of the plane as we taxied to our parking place. I called for a conference with the copilot and the mechanic/load master, who were with LESEA ministries and asked if they had a plan. They told me they did not, but asked us to pray for an answer.

The team checked in, ate dinner, and settled in for a long night of prayer. Half of our team and one third of our cargo were in London, we were in Larnaca, Cyprus, and our aircraft was broken. The prayer time began... “Lord, this is no surprise to you. Reveal your will through this event. Are you stopping us to save our lives? Do you have an alternate plan that will bring you more glory? Will you bless us with repairs to our plane? Father, find us another engine. From our perspective, repairing our plane would be best. It would put us back on track with our prepared plan. Father, show us your will. We do not want permission to work our plan, but we wish to be obedient to your plan.” This was the essence of our requests.

The copilot caught me at breakfast. He was grinning from ear to ear. “We found an engine last night and we are leaving shortly to have it installed! I found it in a junk yard in Lisbon, Portugal. The Portuguese Air Force will make the engine change for us. Isn’t that miraculous?” he said excitedly! Then he added, “We takeoff after breakfast.”

I went to the airport with them thinking about my team and cargo flying over the Zagros Mountains into Iran in an ancient C130 using an engine out of a Portuguese junk yard. After watching their takeoff, I went into the airport office and began my research for available charter aircraft. Every company I called had some reason or limitation that prevented us from using them. That is, except one. They used a Russian military transport plane. When I called the British Air Ministry to inquire about a landing permit, they said that type of aircraft had such a bad safety record that it was not allowed to use British airports. So much for that idea!

It was almost lunch time and my fretting, research, and international calls had produced nothing. My time would have been better spent on my knees in prayer.

Our after lunch prayer meeting focused on confession of my doubts, asking forgiveness for my attempts to “make things happen”, and focusing, with the team on the needs of our flight crew. We decided to continue in a “pray as you may” mode until we heard from our flight crew.

Now, the rest of the story!

Only God could make this happen!

The plane was flying on three engines. It crossed the entire length of the Mediterranean Sea and was approaching Lisbon, Portugal. Their radio calls to air traffic control were unanswered. They began calling approach control for the Airbase. No response. They were low on fuel, they saw the runway, there were no transmissions on the control tower frequency, no response came to their radio calls, and there were no other aircraft in sight, so they landed. As they taxied toward the control tower, a jeep drove up beside them and flagged them to stop. The pilot opened his window and waved. The sergeant shouted, “What are you doing here?”

“We came for an engine exchange.” was the pilot’s reply. The sergeant signaled for the plane to follow him.

He led them to a maintenance hangar, and said that the base was closed because the Pope was visiting Lisbon. That explained the radio silence. Our crew chief told him about the engine from the junkyard. He replied, “Oh, so, you are the ones we were told about! The engine is coming across town on a truck right now. We have orders to install it for you.”

Our crew chief was puzzled because he had no knowledge of any requested orders. “Where did the orders come from?”

“I do not know,” said the sergeant, and pointing skyward, he added, “Maybe from Him!”

The plane had left Cyprus early Friday morning and I received an excited call from the crew chief on Saturday afternoon informing me that the engine had been installed and was being ground tested. His plan was to fly to London Sunday morning and pick up the cargo and crew. They would expect to arrive Sunday evening.

God had provided everything from parts to manpower in an incredible twenty-four hours!

However, when the crew arrived at the plane Sunday morning, they were met by an officer who said the plane could not be released until they paid the \$24,000 installation charges. The crew chief said he began to pray for an answer. During the prayer, he was reminded that a large church in Lisbon was a part of the LESEA food program. He ended his prayer, called the pastor, and the pastor said, “It is really strange that you should call this morning. I happened to bring a blank check from the church with me this weekend. I will make it out for the fee and drop it off at the Air Base on my way to church.” A gracious, benevolent, prayer answering God had responded to our need! This was an affirmation that God was guiding and providing for the ministry He assigned us.

We gathered for a prayer and praise meeting when the second team and cargo arrived.

The next day was filled with phone calls, faxes, map study, equipment check, and devotional time. Jim Furgerson, the former Marine helicopter and F-4 fighter pilot, commented, "Oh, by the way we had a couple of hydraulic lines rupture when we landed." I told him that we had one break also. He shrugged his shoulders and opined, "She is really an old bird."

We tried to leave for Iran two separate days. Both days the trip was aborted because of hydraulic problems. Evidently old C-130s leak some hydraulic fluid because of all the various systems with hydraulic cylinders. The mechanic said, "If you can mop up the puddle of fluid with six rags, then it was tight enough to be airworthy." Every time I walked out to inspect the aircraft there would be a five to ten gallon puddle under the wings or fuselage!

The spiritual battle began to ratchet up to a higher level.

I was fighting disappointment and depression. Those two attitudes were certain indicators that the enemy, Satan, was present, armed, and ready for battle. We were nine days into the journey and still had not fed or helped one Kurd...or so I thought. We went back to the Nazarene Guest Dormitory we had borrowed to house our crew. Prayer, Bible study, and singing hymns closed out our evening with my request for the team to pray for Satan's defeat and for God to come to us and get us into Iran.

We crawled into our bunks and continued to pray. Doubts and questions were flying around in my head. One by one they were dealt with, but others popped up instantly. In frustration I prayed, "God only you can answer all this. What has happened? Have we missed the track? Why the delay? Are you keeping us from dangers we cannot see? What are you trying to show us, or teach us? Help! I need some light. Why can't we get in?" Suddenly, a silent voice spoke to my mind, "Read Psalm 101." I began to read:

"I will sing of your love and justice;

To you, O Lord, I will sing praise.

I will be careful to lead a blameless life

When will you come to me?"

"That is it, Lord!" I prayed, "When are you going to come to us and get us into Iran?"

"When you lead a blameless life," said the silent voice.

My reaction was, "Do what?! I have been up to my ears in this project day and night, beside that I am a Baptist preacher and I have not had time to sin! (I was thinking of the big ones because, at the end of each day I had spent time confessing the daily ones I could remember)." "Where is there blame in my life? Show me and I will deal with it." I prayed. The silent voice said, "Read on." I did.

"I will walk in my house

With a blameless heart."

All right let's look at that one. Where in my home have I sinned? I love my wife and children. Dr L. and I kept our selves for marriage; I have been faithful to her. I have tried to raise Godly children and I have provided for them...Then the Holy Spirit began to focus the laser of conviction on my heart and illuminated sins in my family life that I had been too insensitive to recognize as sin. They had slipped under my righteous radar.

For instance:

Neglecting my children, "I will take you fishing Saturday" but I got busy and broke my promise.

Demonstrating selfishness by doing things that I wanted to do without consideration for their needs or desires.

After scratching the surface of my sin pool, He really dug deep, surfacing stuff I had missed, ignored, or discounted as unimportant. When I surfaced from that dive, the silent voice said, "Read on."

Vs.3 "I will set before my eyes no vile thing."

Oh, that was a rough one. How can you read a magazine or newspaper and not see pictures of vile things. The restaurant where we ate was on the edge of a topless beach. It was the only one which could handle our size group for every meal and would accept my credit card. I had to confess the sins of my eyes.

The second part of verse three and verse four plunged me deeper in confession and repentance than I had been since my conversion.

"The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me.

Men of a perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil."

I was drawn into the basement of my life, the place where my daily transgressions are kept. Every time I pray, I seek to sweep it clean with confession and repentance. The Holy Spirit forced me to tear up the basement floor to see what was being hidden beneath it. I have always considered that you must confess sin as you have committed sin, one at a time, not in a lump of, "Forgive me of all my sins." That is the exercise the Holy Spirit led me through. It was a trip that started with my high school days, a trip through dirty jokes, crude, rude behavior, criticizing and judging people instead of loving them unconditionally, preaching well prepared but unanointed sermons, using God's name in vain by telling people that "God is leading us to..." when it actually was my plan, not His. The list would fill another book.

I started weeping when the Word began to hit my heart. I wept through the night as my prayer of cleansing continued. I had never experienced such a catharsis of my soul. Just before daylight my soul quieted and joy began to overcome all of the heaviness of heart. I had a sense of God's pleasure brightening the atmosphere of my soul.

The team was having the same experience of cleansing, not as a group, but as each man standing alone before God. I discovered this later as one by one; the men shared their testimonies of brokenness with me in private.

The next morning we went to the airport and six rags wiped up the fluid puddle. We would fly! We loaded all of the equipment and cargo and half of the team of twelve, Mafa, and three Norwegian nurses. The missionary told the Iranians we were an international team, so, he sent the three Norwegians to keep us legal.

Before we finished loading, I went to the flight deck with my military aviation charts and ask them to give me the course of the flight. I wanted to mark it on my charts. They looked shocked and asked, "Do you have air navigation charts of Iran?" I told them that I also had charts for Turkey, Iraq, and the whole Middle East. They were ecstatic! "All we have are road maps of Iran. Can we have them?" They were happy and I felt safer. The maps played a very important role on the second trip, which brought the rest of the crew.

On the second trip, there was a heavy overcast of clouds. The mountains surrounding the Sanandaj Airport were obscured. Warren Hart, the former Air Force navigator used dead reckoning navigation (using observed ground speed, a plotted magnetic course with the magnetic variations noted on the aviation charts, the distance from the last known fix to the destination, and a stopwatch). He was so accurate that they broke out of the clouds, between the mountains, right over the mountain valley airport!

On the first trip, we climbed up to altitude over places the Apostle Paul had been and headed for Turkey, from there we would turn south to enter Iran.

I was thinking through the previous night's experience and I began to pray, "Father, I have been doing disaster relief work since 1967 and I have never had any event preceded by such a soul searching experience. We always prepare spiritually for our work, but nothing like this. Why did you hold us out of Iran for nine days? Did it take that long to break us and remold us for this work? Why for this work?"

The silent voice said, "Read Daniel 9 and 10."

I did and I was stunned!

Chapter nine begins with an introduction of king Darius, a Mede who was made king of the Babylonian Kingdom. The Medes are the same group as the Kurds today. Then the truth in chapter ten was the thing that stunned me. Daniel had begun to pray and God immediately sent an Angel messenger with the answer to his prayer. Daniel was living in Persia, now Iran, and the Angel had to battle "The prince of the Persian Kingdom" for twenty-one days to get the message to him. Michael, one of the chief princes of the Angels had to come to Persia to help him get through the Evil that ruled the Persian Kingdom. No wonder we had to be spiritually clean, we were going to Hell's front door!

My prayer continued as a prayer of praise. I was also reading my Bible as we flew into Iran. I was reading Colossians 1:1-29. I knew many Christians were praying for us and that prayer was the wind beneath our wings. This was driven home by the Scripture as I read verse nine through fourteen, "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."(NIV)

The Scripture had an electrifying impact, like getting a fax from God! It gave me tremendous reassurance that God was with us, the prayer partners were praying with power, and God was going to give us victory in the battle ahead.

Suddenly, my BBGA, who was always present when I prayed, appeared in a posture for combat, his sword was drawn, his face showed anger, and he was standing over me as a shield. I knew, without asking, that we had crossed the border into Iran.

Chapter 16

Iran: Boots on the Ground

The flight path took us down the Zagros Mountain Range to the valley where the city of Sanandaj is located in Northwestern Iran. With the city airport in sight, we entered the approach pattern without radio contact. This country had been closed to Americans for thirteen years, so there were no radio frequencies listed on the charts. Landing in a hostile country is not safe. Landing in a hostile country in an AMERICAN C-130 military aircraft, even though it is painted white, is dangerous. Landing that aircraft without radio contact and landing clearance is nuts! We were nuts!

We landed and taxied to the control tower and stopped. Immediately, soldiers surrounded the plane with automatic weapons.

I told the pilot to keep the engines running and I would step out the crew door, and they were to watch me to see what happened. If there was trouble, they were to gun the engines and shut the door while running toward the runway.

I stepped out and walked toward the soldier with the most brass on his collar, as the soldiers tightened the circle with their weapons at the ready. A group of civilians appeared behind the soldiers, walked through their ranks, stepped over in front of the weapons, and one of them shouted, "Hallelujah! Praise God, you are here!"

I responded with, "Hallelujah! Praise God that YOU are here!"

That eased the tension and the soldiers lowered their weapons. I explained to the captain that we were an international humanitarian aid group, and our project was Kurdish relief. He called the airport officials. They knew nothing of our coming. I had expected this because of my experience with foreign countries. The diplomats and officials may have worked with you, but they seldom remember to pass the word along to the customs and immigration authorities. I always carry every conceivable document, manifest, official letters, letters of request, letters of agreement, etc., in triplicate. I also carry some gold seals, ribbon, an embossing clamp just in case I need to make a simple letter more "official" appearing.

An extremely agitated and angry Iranian official arrived. Mafa met him at the aircraft with a smile and all of our paperwork from the Iranian Embassy in London. The man was shouting in anger in Mafa's face. Mafa maintained a smile and a quiet, friendly manner. I was so proud of him! He was acting like a Christian.

Two trucks arrived and soldiers swarmed over our cargo. They had no equipment to handle pallets of cargo, so the straps were cut and everything was hand carried to the trucks. I was thinking, "This going to be a mess when we try to reorganize this into the three kitchens." I thought the equipment was being stored for us until we moved to the refugee camps, but the leader of the Iranian Christian Fellowship, the group that met us at the airport, told me that everything was being confiscated! Everything brought into the country for the Kurds was being confiscated by the Red Crescent organization.

We were in trouble! We could not work without our equipment. But that was only one minor problem compared to the other problem about to surface.

After the plane was unloaded, I was saying farewell, and the crew chief said they planned to fly to Tel Aviv for maintenance before returning for the other crew. I froze in shock when I heard this. I spoke to them in a strong stage whisper through gritting teeth, "Don't be idiotic! If

their radar tracks you to Israel from here, we are all dead men! As group leader, I order you to go back to Turkey before you turn south!” They apologized and said that they had not thought of the danger. Whew! That was a tragedy in the making.

The Iranian Christian Fellowship (ICF) took us to our governmentally assigned hotel. There was a machine gun turret on the roof and all of our rooms faced a building with a machine gun mounted on the roof. At this point we were depending on the ICF for leadership and direction. They had been advised of the operation through the missionary in London, money had been transferred to them, and they were ready to help us with manpower as well. How all of this was done was so clandestine, I have had to deduce what must have occurred from the results. The next morning the ICF leader came to get me. He was worried about something from the look on his face. “The authorities demand that I bring you to their headquarters for interrogation! I do not know what that might mean.” he said, sadly. The crew looked shocked and said that they would be in prayer for me.

The office was the office of the same person who met us at the airport and was so furious that Americans had come to Iran. It did not look good. The man thought we were American spies, CIA, FBI, or something. He shouted, railed, turned red in the face, and stormed around my chair. My interpreter from the ICF was trying to translate as fast as possible. I gave my answers in a firm, steady voice, trying to show calmness based on innocence. He finally went back to his desk, sat down, looked at me with a thoughtful gaze, and began to ask me procedural and technical questions in a calmer voice. Questions about kitchen capacity and food preparation times were asked. He doubted our ability to deliver what we promised. I had to explain every detail of cooking in shifts around the clock, if necessary, timed pot cycles to multiply their use, etc. God had fortified me with an abundance of detailed information that I was using through one of our cooks. I had assigned the task of determining our kitchen’s capacity to John Lilly. John was manager of the IBM team at NASA for all of the Apollo launches. He gave me enough information to fill a book, and, at the moment, I was using all of it! God had given me a lot of high class helpers.

Six hours after the ordeal had begun; he paused in the questioning, raised his hand, and snapped his fingers. The guard, standing by the door slung his AK 47 over his shoulder and disappeared into the hallway. I looked at my friend and asked, “What is happening?” He told me the official had called for tea. When I asked if that was a good or bad sign, he replied, “We shall see!”

We were drinking our tea in silence. It was interrupted by the interrogator who said, “I believe you are who you say you are. I believe you can do what you say you can do. How may I help you? What will you need to do your job?”

I nearly fell out of my chair!

I began to chant my grocery list, “Beans, rice, raisins, lentils, onions, garlic, meat, oil...”

“I will help you.” he said, and dismissed us with a smile and a handshake.

The second interrogation occurred when I got back to my crew at the fortified hotel. They were regaled by my account because it confirmed answers to all their prayers. God is so good!

I finally had time to sit down, take a deep breath, relax a moment, and have my daily Bible reading. It was Colossians chapter 2. It was as if God was explaining to me what had occurred that day. He exercised His authority over everything. Verse 10 says, “And you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.”

Chapter 2, verse 15 explained what had happened in the rough interrogation session. "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." He had disarmed the enemy and turned their hearts to help us in His service! What a great God we serve!

The next day I met with the Iranian official in charge of the refugee camps and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I had to endure a lecture from the Iranian concerning his country's anger about the US shooting down one of their airliners full of pilgrims on their way to Mecca. I had learned the proper response is to look grieved over the terrible accident. Eating a slice of "humble pie" may not taste good, but it gets people past the emotional blockage to going forward with the work. You cannot argue with emotions. They must be quieted. It was my understanding that the passenger plane was displaying a military transponder code, and I did not mention the fact that our US Embassy personnel were held as hostages for 444 days.

The three of us finally began studying the various refugee camps, their populations, what help they were receiving, and where they were located. The wall map was marked with their location and the approximate camp populations listed.

Near the town of Marivan, there was a huge camp located high in the mountains. It was located in a high valley called the Valley of the Dolanav. It was very near the Iraqi border in the Zagros Mountains and contained 14,500 refugees. I asked about support for the camp and was told there was none.

Our team was called to prayer about this possible assignment. We felt this camp was ideal for several reasons. It would require all of our kitchens to be united in one place easing our supply problem. It would consolidate all of our team in one place. I thought this was best due to the hostility against Americans in the country. Our military was beginning to work in Northern Iraq and we would be closer to them, if escape became necessary.

The assignment for the large camp was given to us and we began to prepare for the trip. One big question had to be answered, "Where is our equipment?" I left our packed and ready team in prayer and found the Red Crescent warehouse. I went to the director and requested our equipment. His reply to our request was, "No, all of the contents of this warehouse is ours!" I informed him that we had brought our equipment with us and it was taken from us at the airport by his men. It was not a donation! We argued, bargained, and negotiated for two and a half hours before a call from our original interrogator settled the question.

When I walked into the warehouse storage area, I saw my first Kurds in their customary attire. They wore turbans, long-sleeved shirts, covered by a vest, sandals, and trousers which were tight at the ankle, baggy on the legs, and tight at the waist with a sash around the waist: they looked like my BBGA (Big, Black Guardian Angel)!

I went into the warehouse and was amazed by what I saw. Our equipment was scattered everywhere. All of the warehouse workers were Kurds. Word was whispered among them about who we were and what we were trying to do.

To find our stuff I had to climb over crates, boxes, and piles of canvas. A Kurdish worker went with me. I would point to an item, pat my chest signaling that the item was mine. I speak good sign language. One of the workers bumped me very firmly with his shoulder. It startled me. I wondered if it was a belligerent action, or a communicative one. I turned to face him as he walked away. He stopped, leaned on a crate, bracing himself with his hand. I approached him warily, trying to get him to look at me. He would not look up. He just kept staring at the crate. I followed his gaze and saw the label, "Kurdish Relief Supplies from the

United Methodists of America”. When I looked up, he was smiling at me. I got the message; the Kurds wanted the donations to their people to get to their people.

It was the place where they were collecting supplies sent for Kurdish relief from around the world. I do not think they were hoarding it, they just did not know what to do with it. Without a word, I pointed to it and patted my chest, signaling that the case was mine. Suddenly, the Kurds became energized, leading me from crate to crate. I would look at the label give an affirmative nod and follow my Kurdish guide to the next one.

It took two large trucks to bring our cargo from the airport, but it took three large trucks to take “our stuff” from the warehouse. We were “thoroughly furnished unto good works” by the Lord. We picked up large military tents for storage, a field clinic from Denmark, camp furniture from the Methodists, over 1,000 lbs. of silvadine burn cream, boxes of medicine from the Church of God and The Church of the Nazarene, etc.

At last, everything came together for us to finally begin our ministry to the Kurdish refugees in the Dolanov Camp, or... so we thought. The first team loaded on a bus (built like a school bus) and we moved out in a caravan with the trucks. At a rest and tea stop, I noticed all of the propane tanks were missing. Our ICF translator said the authorities confiscated them because they were not strong enough to hold Iranian propane. They were told full tanks would be delivered to us when we arrived in the Dolanov Camp. I immediately began drawing designs for camp stoves that would burn wood, grass, or dried animal dung. I had learned promises were not reliable.

I hope this gives you some idea why I said you must be more than flexible, you must be fluid. There is always some element of your plan that is in flux. But there are two rock solid things that never change: God and His Word. He is never surprised, He never changes, His promises are guarantees and you can bet your life on them. And, that was exactly what we were doing. He will bring Glory to Himself. I have learned to give Him the glory and not touch any of it for myself. This was His project. I only had the privilege of responding to His invitation to join Him in it.

Periodically, along the roadside, I would see a sign painted on a wall, a fence, or most frequently on large rocks. It consisted of a few red and white stripes, with a patch of blue, and it would have a message in Farsi written over it. I finally was curious enough to ask my ICF brother what the signs said. He said, “You do not want to know.” I insisted and he read the next one to me, “Satanist America is our arch enemy! Death to America! Slay all Americans!”

He was correct. I did not really want to know what they said.

We were in hostile territory!

My explanation of the signs made quite an improvement in the quality of our team’s prayer life.

The servicing of the C 130 delayed its return to Cyprus for the second crew. I was concerned about their entrance into Iran. We had no way of warning them what to expect and how to respond to their interrogation. Another concern was how to handle the confiscation of their equipment. So, we spent a lot of time in prayer as our caravan climbed higher in to the mountains. Praying for the second team helped us have courage for our own situation. These delays prevented our second team from arriving until we had already established our kitchen and clinic at the Dolanov Camp. While they were being delayed, Jim Furgerson used the time for concentrated prayer meetings. He and I had learned that a delay was a time to pray. God handles the schedule. Our responsibility is to pray for the ability to be obedient and to pray that Satan would be bound out of the project. I am a firm believer in offensive and defensive prayer!

The caravan went through the last town, Marivan, before climbing into the high mountain Dolanov Valley. We went through many military checkpoints in our journey. This area had been the battleground through which Iraq had attacked Iran. Iran fought back and regained the valley, but they could not hold it permanently. The two armies went back and forth through the valley many times. It was a valley of death. The village in the mountain pass that entered the valley had been bombarded with poison gas by the Iraqi army. Washing was spread on bushes to dry, windows and doors stood open, and it appeared as if the people just evaporated! It was a silent witness to the violence of the valley.

Our caravan entered the camp and stopped at the camp commandant's office. It was a steel freight container with windows and doors cut in the sides. I introduced myself to the commandant, Mr. Langroody, explained why we were there, and asked his permission to set up our personal camp and our kitchen equipment. I was very impressed by his cordial welcome and willingness to work with us.

I have experienced the same cordiality in many hostile places. When you get past the politicians and bureaucrats, people are people and good relationships begin to grow when you are working together to solve a problem or to meet needs.

Several times, while we were setting up camp, Mr. Langroody would invite me to a working lunch. We would discuss the camp needs, our resources, and work on ways to solve camp problems he was experiencing. We would sit on the floor, with crossed legs, and share a plate of rice with a can of sardines dumped on top.

Establishing our camp and setting up our kitchen was an amazing operation!

We had enough tarpaulins to cover a 40 by 60 square foot area where we were going to place our kitchen operation, but we had no way of setting it up. Someone produced some tall poles from a scrap pile. Larry Blanchard, one of God's Cajun miracles, looked over the situation and immediately began to solve the problem. Men held the first pole while Larry climbed it and secured rope around the top, told us to set guy ropes and stakes. With the first pole secure, he did the same thing for about eight or nine more poles. He showed us how to hoist the tarps up and secure them. When he finished, we had a 40 by 60 foot roof over our kitchen area!

I called him a Cajun miracle. He worked for the Collins Radio company, for years, installing radio equipment on all the presidential aircraft from Columbine to the first Air Force One. While working on a radar nose cone, the manlift broke. He fell, broke his back, had to have spinal fusions in two places, and has had to live with pain ever since. For years after that, he led mountaineering trips for institutionalized boys as a part of our "Upward Bound" program. I asked him about these trips and the 70 lb. pack he had to carry. "Larry doesn't that hurt your back to do that?"

His reply was, "John, it hurts all the time. I might as well let it hurt while I am doing good for somebody instead of just sitting at home and letting it hurt anyway."

He was also a comfort on the C-130 on the flight between England and Cyprus. The flight engineer crawled from under the flight deck several times in flight with a mechanism in his hand. He would go through a big box of parts, find one that matched it, crawl back under the flight deck, and install it...in flight! I looked at Larry with raised eyebrows and he said, "Don't worry, Brother John. I have worked on so many of these that I have all of the wiring diagrams and schematics in my head. Everything is alright." A little later the left inboard engine quit. I looked at him and he smiled...we were still OK. Then I encouraged the rest of the team with confidence!

Like most camp operations, inquisitive people loiter around the edges of your area, trying to find out what is happening. The Kurds quickly discovered who we were and what we were doing. They were so happy and grateful that we were there to help them! Many began to volunteer, helping us lay out the cooking and water purifying areas. One Kurd brought his front end loader and began to build a six foot berm, or wall, of dirt around our camping and work area which separated our camp from the military camp. He had escaped Iraq with his family and a few belongings riding in the bucket.

He built this without my request or permission. I thought it was a nice gesture and would help define our work area when the cooking started. He knew things that we did not. There was occasional small arms fire during the day, but at night you would hear a burst of automatic weapon fire frequently. Since there were rebel forces in the area, the soldiers were very jumpy at night. I believe their motto must have been, "shoot first, ask questions later." One afternoon, I saw a Kurdish man about 200 yards outside of the camp's perimeter. A soldier watched him for awhile, then raised his AK47 and fired. The man's body lay there until dark, but was gone the next morning. The Kurd was protecting us from danger we did not know existed.

God does that for us.

All of our cooking equipment was placed in the military squad tents we had obtained at the Red Crescent warehouse. The next day I opened one of the stove boxes in the tent and pulled the newspaper packing from around the burner. One of the ICF men saw the newspaper and went into a panic! He shut the tent flap and ran to get the ICF interpreter. The ICF brother came in the tent, he took one look, and he went into a panic! He whispered, "If anyone sees this we are all dead men! Western newspapers and magazines are forbidden here as Satanist propaganda. We must burn this before it is seen!"

God was at work. If we had not had everything confiscated, we would not have been in the warehouse. If we had not been in the warehouse, we would not have been helped by the Kurdish workers to get the extra supplies...which included the tents. If we had not had the tents, I would have unpacked the stoves in the open and the newspapers would have caused our execution. When you are walking the razor's edge between life and death, you can trust God to orchestrate your salvation.

After all, He has already demonstrated that...big time!

The next day we organized our food preparation area, set up 21 stove sites next to it, marked off the food distribution area, and set up the water purification and distribution area. One major problem was in three parts: first, we had no tanks and fuel; secondly, we had no food to prepare; thirdly, we had no water to purify. Other than that, we were ready to help the people!

That night we met in a six person mountain tent, shared scripture, discussed our situation, sang hymns, and prayed. We worshiped the Father for who He is, we praised the Father for what he had done, we confessed our sins, we ask the Father to demonstrate the truth of His promises, we prayed by quoting His promises for protection and provision, and we laid the needs of these pitiful people before Him. During our prayer for food, we heard the sound of a heavily loaded truck groaning its way up the mountain road. I kept praying out loud. The clanging sound of propane bottles bumping against each other was heard as the truck drew closer.

John Lilly interrupted my prayer shouting, "God has sent us food!" I looked up and told him that it was only gas bottles and bowed my head again to continue my prayer, but he retorted, "God is not wasteful. If He sent us gas, He is sending us food!"

We hastily finished our prayer and went outside to unload the propane. One look at the bottles and my heart dropped into the pit of my stomach. The "authorities" had taken our

propane tanks, cut the top out of one, cut the top and bottom out of the second one, and cut the bottom out of the third one. They were welded together into one gigantic tank and the valves had been changed. All of our tanks had been modified like this. The tanks weighed about 150 pounds when they were full of fuel and our regulators would no longer fit the valves. Now they were very hard to handle and would not connect to our stoves.

I told the ICF brother what had happened and replied, "No problem!" I always go on full alert and take nothing for granted when a local person in a foreign country tells me, "No problem!" in answer to a question.

The gas truck had hardly cleared our perimeter when we heard the sound of another truck climbing the mountain road. It was the food truck! The food was rice, beans, lintels, and raisins. Most of it was in 100 kilogram sacks (220 lbs.).

The workers started unloading the food. I got in the line, backed up to the truck, two men put a sack on my back, and I leaned forward to balance the load over my hips. I walked over to the food storage area and two men took the sack off my back and put it on the stack of bags. On my third trip, someone noticed my gray hair and pulled me out of line. They said that elders do not carry loads. There were some things about their society that I really liked.

The next morning we were attempting ways to modify their propane tanks to use our regulators. Our regulators which reduce the pressure from over 200 pounds per square inch down to 15 ounces of pressure have a threaded POL fitting which screws into the tank valve. The Iranians use a regulator which is tapered to insert in the threadless tank valve, it seals with a rubber gasket, and clamps to the tank valve's lip. Suddenly, an old Nissan pickup truck came roaring into camp, skidded to a halt, and a smiling ICF worker jumped out with a bag of Iranian regulators!

We used tape, rubber hoses, worm clamps, and glue to connect our stoves to their regulators. Eventually we used everything we brought to meet the various needs that surfaced. God had directed every phase of our equipment and supplies selection, and our packing. How cool is that?

If we had not had our tanks modified, we would not have been set up to use their local tanks which we had to have as an added supply. Cooking 2,800 lbs. of rice per day demanded a lot of propane!

Many Kurds volunteered to help in the cooking and food preparation areas. Some of them had been cooks in the Iraqi army. One of them said, "When the Americans bombed my unit, I was digging very fast in the sand. I am glad that your smart bombs were not smart enough to find me!" He chuckled and kept stirring the pot of rice.

All of the rice and beans had to be washed to remove the dirt and small stones. The plywood sides to our packing crates served as wash racks for the grains, beans, lentils, and raisins. After every cooking session, about 20-40 boys would come to wash everything for the next cycle. One of our men referred to them as our "Kurdish Dishwashing Machine".

One of the problems that developed was the slower than normal cooking time for the rice and beans. For years I taught mountaineering for the BSSB Church Recreation Department and was accustomed to cooking at high altitudes. But, having driven up to the valley instead of climbing, I had not thought of the altitude gain as being significant...until I checked the temperature of the boiling water. Instead of 212 degrees Fahrenheit, it was boiling at 195 degrees. I estimated that we were fairly close to 9,000 feet of altitude.

The problem was easily solved with a little Cajun engineering. We spread our Tee shirts over the tops of the 60 quart pots, put the pot lids on the shirts, and piled large rocks on the lids.

The Tee shirts formed a gasket with the pot lids and the rocks made our pots pressure cookers. Not only was the problem solved, but the added pressure made the food cook faster.

One of the powerful blessings that occurred, was when Col. Jim Furgerson arrived with his group. We had barely gotten the kitchen assembled and functioning, we were very tired, and Jim's arrival was a real morale booster. He had faced the same interrogator, but the man was familiar with our operation and he did not take as long with Jim as he had with me. Their equipment and supplies were also confiscated, but they were not returned. This meant we were one \$25,000 water purifier and one airlift kitchen short of our original inventory.

The ICF saw our need for more large pots and brought us a pickup truck load. They were stacked so high that they had to be held on the truck with ropes! This was a tremendous advantage for us. We could cook and send some large pots through the camp to transport the food. Some of the pots could hold 25 gallons of food.

Every evening the group gathered in the large tent for Scripture reading, singing, and prayer. Food would come in the morning. This devotional time was extremely important to the success of our project in ways we did not realize until later. For instance, there were a group of older Kurds who came to our kitchen and gathered in our supply tent. I discovered they were meeting with Mafa Barzani. Since Mafa's uncle was the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party, he was highly respected. I gave my ICF interpreter a job that put him next to the wall of the tent and asked him to eavesdrop on their conversation. He came to me later with a big smile and said, "You should have heard Mafa! He asked them if they knew why these Americans were here taking care of them. They replied that America was helping them because they tried to kill Saddam. He told them they were wrong. He said the Americans are here because they know Jesus. The elders said that they knew about Jesus because he was in the Koran. Mafa told them that he knew Jesus like they did out of the Koran, but the Americans knew Jesus out of the Bible. He told them that they knew Jesus as a prophet of Allah, but the Americans knew Him as the son of Allah. He told them that the Americans pray to Allah at night in Jesus name and Allah sent the answer before morning. "I have seen it with my own eyes!" he said. The men told him that perhaps the Americans had a better way to Allah and they needed to consider it. It was fabulous!"

Having a retired Marine as a ministry partner was priceless! Jim had served with various national armed forces as a liaison officer and knew military protocol and tactics. He had served as a Marine helicopter pilot in Viet Nam and retired as an F4 pilot and aerial combat instructor. We were soul mates long before this assignment. When Jim came into camp, he took me aside and said the International Mission Board had declared this mission was far too dangerous and to get everybody out. I told him that was impossible because these people needed our help and our sudden departure would indicate that we were liars. I mentioned this to the ICF leader. It threw him into a panic, and he told Jim that we would all be executed as spies if we tried to leave. We stayed and served.

Jim was also a great source of information I did not always want. When I said, "Look, Jim, here come three soldiers."

His reply was, "That is a fire team. See how they space themselves to offer each other cover. Notice the levers on their AK47's. They all have their weapons set on full automatic. They can spray an area very quickly. If you hear one shot, do not look around, just fall flat on the ground." I did not really want to know that.

One afternoon, three explosions came in succession. I saw smoke rising from behind a rock formation that looked like a giant hand with fingers extended skyward. I asked Jim, "What

was that?” As the smoke billowed up, he replied, “Those were mortar shells. The local Kurdish guerillas were probably shooting at the army camp on the other side of our dirt wall and missed. They are probably untrained militia.” I did not really want to know that.

He continued, “I think their spotter and weapon are located in that mountain saddle.” He rolled his eyes without turning his head and indicated a dip in the mountain between two peaks.

I asked, “Do you mean that one?” And, I started to raise my hand to point at it.

He instantly, grabbed my hand and began to inspect it as if I were showing him an injury, and simultaneously grunting, “Don’t point with your hand. It will call attention to you and they may think you are involved. Point with your lip, John,” I did, but I certainly looked comical...but safe.

He offered more information, “Being untrained troops, they will get cold and build a fire for tea tonight. When they do, our guards will see them and start shooting. Be prepared.” I did not really want to know that.

At 10:30 pm, Jim told me to stretch, yawn, roll my head to the right, and look up at the mountain saddle. I did and there was the campfire! “Our guards will see that in a minute and when they do, everything that fires a bullet will cut loose on that fire,” Jim continued.

When it happened, it was a shocking sound! AK47s, fifty caliber machine guns, and twenty millimeter canons make a powerful racket as tracer bullets filled the sky. The campfire disappeared. I was glad I knew that was coming!

The cooperation with the camp commander was very good. He discovered we would not only help the refugees, but were eager to help him as well. We bought three cows to put in the stew one day. We sent him a pot of boiled beef. He was so thankful. Sardines had been his only meat for months. He hooked some security lights to our water purifier’s generator. We were the only source electricity in the camp.

Mr. Langroody ordered huge water bladders for our camp and had trucks deliver water every day. They must have held three thousand gallons each. The truck driver was a Kurd. He was so grateful for what we were doing to help his people that he fell in love with us! He would bring me flowers, a real gift of friendship in his culture. He was always smiling and happy to help us help his people.

We drew water from the bladders and processed it with one of our machines. The water was fed into a series of metal tanks with spigots. The women would draw water for their families from the tanks.

Our purifiers were very good. The water came in through a 20 micron filter, passed through a 10 micron filter and a one micron filter. Then, it went through a media pod that removed heavy metals and carcinogens. A charcoal filter was next, followed by an ultraviolet tube. The last step was chlorinating the water with a chlorine pump. The equipment salesman had said, “It could transform biological soup into clean, baby safe drinking water.” We prayed that he was truthful!

However, we did have a water problem. Every day a food inspector would come to the camp. I had never had this happen before in any of our disaster responses at home. Every day he would test the water and tell us the chlorine content was too high. We normally ran the chlorine slightly higher to combat the unsanitary vessels that were used to transport the water to the family areas. When I reduced the amount of chlorine, he still said it was too high. This went on for several days. I turned the chlorine pump off and he still said the content was too high. I was so frustrated that I finally disconnected the pump and removed the connecting tubing.

The inspector was unimpressed and said something in our machines was the problem.

I went to the truck driver who loved us so much for helping his people and asked him to tell me about the water. He told me how he pumped it out of a river in the valley below and brought it straight to our camp. I asked if he stopped anywhere for tea or a rest stop where someone might have access to the water. He said, "No, but because you are helping my people I did not want you to get sick with the river water so I always put this in the water!" And proudly held up a container of chlorine powder!

Problem solved!

Richard Hurst, M.D. from Tyler, Texas was an astounding man! He held clinic about twelve hours a day and longer some days. He did everything from well baby clinics to surgery to remove shrapnel. He would come to our team meetings looking like he was ready to burst into tears. He was deeply moved by the children who had been living in conditions that exposed them to harsh living conditions and the weather. He said their skin was dry and cracking and their hands looked like the hands of a farmer who had done hard labor for years, rough and calloused.

Mr. Langroody asked me to inspect some areas of the camp with him. As I got in the truck he was driving, I counted at least a dozen bullet holes in the door and fenders on my side. Prayer time!

We discussed ways to improve the camp. I suggested showers and toilets for sanitation, and he asked about a pipeline to bring water off the mountain into the camp. I agreed with him and said I would order supplies for these projects. He asked if we could get some Korean Christians to build the pipeline. I asked why he wanted Korean Christians. He said Anglo or American Christians make the authorities nervous. On the next trip, the C-130 brought supplies for both projects. He was delighted! And, the Kurds did the construction. Many of them were engineers, school teachers, mechanics, carpenters, masons, etc. It was as if you had simply moved an entire city to a refugee camp.

Several weeks into the project I had to go to the nearest town, Marivan, to buy beans. I was wearing blue jeans, a blue shirt with the disaster relief logo, a bright yellow disaster jacket, and a royal blue ball cap with gold braid on the bill. We were walking down the sidewalk when I heard a loud commotion coming toward us. My training told me when a crowd begins to get louder, leave the area immediately! Problem...no place to go and no way to get there! I continued to walk slowly, almost casually, along the street. A parade approached. About 100 soldiers on each side of the street moving in a formation like the treads of a caterpillar tractor, some facing the crowd, some facing the parade of about 200 people. In the middle of the group was an Imam with a loudspeaker. He was screaming, stomping his feet, and beating the air with his fists. My truck driver-translator disappeared.

As the parade passed I realized I was not able to make eye contact with anybody. It was as if I were invisible. The parade passed me and went slowly up the street. Suddenly, a hand grabbed my collar and jerked me backward into a doorway. It was my driver-translator. His English was limited, but he was able to give me the story. "Someone murdered four of the Religious Police last night. The leader of the mosque said Americans paid the rebels to kill them. He was saying that America was our worst enemy and it is the great Satan. We must kill all Americans. Death to all Americans!" he said. "Everybody wears brown and black, you stand there in blue and yellow. An American for sure! But, they pass you by! It is a miracle of God!" he whispered. He said, "Got to get you clothes, come."

He took me to a tailor next door and they whipped up a Kurdish outfit for me...immediately! I left wearing a red and white turban, brown shirt, dark blue vest, and dark

blue Kurdish baggy pants. When I got back to the camp, the Kurdish leaders gathered around me and swore that I looked just like their leader, Masoud Barzani's, brother!

The US military established a "No fly" zone over the Kurdish part of Iraq. The refugees became very excited because they could be going home in relative safety. When I heard the news, I began distributing uncooked rice, beans, lentils, and raisins along with the cooked food. I knew they would need food when they returned home, so I tried to help them with food to carry when they left.

The way we expected the project to work was for our American team to train the Iranian Christian Fellowship in mass feeding, equipment operation, and provide them with resources to get food and supplies. We expected to work with them until either they could handle the task alone or until the camp population was reduced. The two things happened simultaneously. They were doing a great job with the kitchen and people began to leave. We made our plans to be sure the Iranians understood the ICF would be the owners and operators of the equipment. Mr. Langroody understood and was so thankful for what they did that he asked them to help in another area when the Dolanav camp closed.

I always kept an eye on the entrance to the camp. You can learn a lot from the traffic. On the day before we were scheduled to leave, I saw a car followed by a truck loaded with soldiers enter the camp. I had a sense that this was bad. I did not know how bad until a Mullah got out of the car. He was dressed in white covered by a brown flowing robe, and a large brown and white turban. He was followed by a Major with a platoon of infantry from the truck. I called our team together and informed them of the possible problem. "Brothers, I told you when you signed on for this trip that there were some bad possibilities. Well they are here," I said. I continued, "I said that the Iranians could throw us out, keep us hostage like the last Americans here thirteen years ago, or they could shoot us as enemies. The man who makes those decisions just came into camp with a platoon of soldiers."

"Let's pray," whispered one of the men. We did! We formed a prayer circle in the supply storage area and prayed for the one and a half hours the Mullah took to walk through the refugee camp. He came to our kitchen, looked at our pots of hot food, and walked up to me. He stopped about five feet away and stared at me. I noticed he did not blink his eyes. I stared back also without blinking, but I smiled at him at the same time. We stood for about three or four minutes in silence, just staring and neither of us blinked an eye.

The Major said, "These men are not like the Americans we have heard about. They do not drink or smoke. I have watched them for three weeks and they have not bothered any of the women. They sing in the night and they love each other."

The Mullah kept staring. Finally he spoke, "I am going to pray for your families who have allowed you to come to this valley of death. I will pray for Allah to bless them. I am going to pray to Allah for him to bless you for what you have done for these people. May I have the privilege of anointing you with rose oil, the flower of Mohammed, to honor you before these people and to purify your works before Allah?"

I told him that I would be honored and extended my hands with the palms up.

By this time all of the Kurds had gathered around the kitchen, thousands of them, to see what was going to happen to us. When he touched my hands with the rose oil, a loud murmur arose from the crowd. Evidently they had never seen a Mullah anoint anyone with rose oil, and especially anointing an infidel!

When I looked up to thank him, I noticed for the first time that his eyes were blue. He was a Kurd! There were a number of blonde and red headed Kurds in the camp with blue eyes.

I told the ICF minister, who was my main interpreter, that I was totally surprised by the Mullah's response to our presence and work. He said, "He was not honoring you or your religion. He was honoring your fanaticism! When someone shows the kind of courage you have shown by coming here, to this valley of death, they have great respect for them."

The term, "Valley of Death", took on a new perspective for me years later. I knew the Iraqi and Iranian armies had fought back and forth through the valley many times. You could not kick the ground without turning up shell casings of all calibers. But in 2003, twelve years later, a Muslim cleric who was being trained as an Ayatollah visited our church.

He was converted through the witness of our minister of worship, Michael Ryer. After I baptized him, we were talking about Iran and I mentioned the Valley of the Dolanav. He leaped out of his chair, put his face close to mine and shouted, "You were there?"

I said, "Yes, in 1991 during Desert Storm."

He dropped back in his chair, tears streaming down his face, and whispered, "I was a sergeant in the airborne division. I lost five of my men fighting in the Valley of the Dolanav. It was a valley of death. That is where I got this," and, he held up a crippled hand.

My wife and I prayed through the 91st Psalm every day. The events which occurred in Iran fit the verses of the Psalm sequentially. This was our last full day in camp and the Psalm said in verses 14-16, "Because he loves me," Says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."(NIV)

We had been honored and blessed by a Mullah before 14,500 Kurds, and even the attitude of the military changed toward us.

I became aware of this that night. The soldier who stood on the dirt berm behind my tent and watched me all night every night was a huge, muscular man. His AK-47 looked like a toy in his huge hands. His job was to see that I did not sneak out and go into the area where the people lived, or have secret meetings with the Kurds.

I had tried to befriend him with offers of food or hot drinks on cold nights, but he remained aloof and stern while standing over my tent. After the Mullah's visit, his attitude changed. That night as I sat beside the campfire, using a table and camp chairs donated by the Methodists, I prepared two cups of hot chocolate. I set one in front of me and put the other at the other end of the table. I looked up at him and invited him to join me with a hand signal. He paused, smiled, came down from the berm, and sat at the far end of the table. My interpreter joined us. The soldier placed his rifle on the table between us. He ejected a cartridge, held it up to me and explained its impact results when it hits a man. He stuck the bullet in the muzzle of the AK-47 and pried it out of the cartridge. He gave me the bullet and said, "This one was for you, but I just did not use it."

The Psalm said, "With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."

We serve an awesome God!

The last day was filled with breaking camp, distributing equipment to the Iranian Christian Fellowship (ICF), giving our medical supplies to a hospital in Marivan, and saying good bye to the camp director and the Kurdish leaders. Getting the medical supplies to the Marivan hospital produced a very humorous situation.

My translator was too busy with the departure arrangements to go with me. I was accompanied by an ICF worker who spoke no English. At the hospital, I discovered no one spoke English, but I was encouraged by the presence of a translator who came with Medicin

Sans Frontier (The French group called Doctors without Borders). He was translating for the doctor who was speaking English with a heavy French accent. I asked if he would translate for me and he said, "I cannot because I only understand English spoken with a French accent." I laughed and started using my Cajun French accent. Being a La Noue and spending my childhood in south Louisiana really paid off. He smiled and said, "Oh, I understand you very well!"

The team was packed in the bus and almost ready to leave when a platoon of soldiers marched up to us beside the bus. I wondered what was happening when the Sergeant stepped up to me, his men were at attention, and did a "present arms" maneuver. My interpreter whispered, "Take it and fire it." I took the AK-47, pointed it toward Saddam Hussein's Iraq and fired it. The soldiers cheered and I presented arms back to the sergeant and saluted him. The army had come to thank us and say goodbye!

The bus was winding its way on the narrow mountain roads and I began to notice Kurdish men standing on boulders. They were standing at attention and spaced about 500 yards apart. I asked who they were and was told they were Kurdish guerilla fighters who would not come into the refugee camps. I was told they were standing there in our honor, risking their lives to tell us, "Thank you for helping our people!"

There were five military checkpoints between the Dolanav camp and Sanandaj. The protocol was for the soldiers to inspect the bus with a walk around inspection. If they came on the bus, that usually meant trouble for someone. At every checkpoint the soldiers came on our bus, but instead of trouble, there were smiles and "thank yous" for what we had done!

I have waited until this point to relate an incident that occurred in the camp because it was so stunning and the fact that its conclusion did not happen until several years after this event.

When Jim Furgerson joined us in the camp he said the International Mission Board had determined that the area and the mission were too hot with danger and that we should evacuate our personnel immediately. The on-site director of the ICF team was the minister of youth at the church in Tehran. He overheard our conversation as I told Jim that we could not leave. He looked at us with fear in his eyes and said, "If you try to leave, they will kill us all!"

Jim understood the situation and passed word to the IMB that it may be dangerous in the camp, but it would be fatal to try to leave. Three Norwegian medical workers, who accompanied us from London, wanted to help in another camp after spending ten days with us. They packed their gear and went to the camp commander to obtain transportation. They were told they did not have permission to leave the camp. It took them three days to obtain permission to leave our camp. I believe their permission came because they were Norwegians, not Americans.

We realized that we came to the camp as volunteers with our own chartered transportation, but now we were under strict Iranian control. We were prisoners until they released us. I did not share all of this with the men because I had already sent three of my team out when Jim's team arrived. I told the camp commander that I was rotating my crew because some were becoming ill. I had used the occasion to send three Viet Nam veterans out who were having flashbacks about their days in combat. They became our prayer team in town.

I took an opportunity to speak to the church staff member privately, as we worked in the kitchen. I asked him how his church was able to exist under such persecution. He looked at me in wide-eyed surprise and said, "Why, Dr. John, you know that the true church of Jesus Christ grows under persecution. It always has!" Then he surprised me as he said, "In our prayer meetings we always pray for the American churches because they are under such terrible persecution!"

This time I was one who was wide-eyed in amazement! I thought, “What propaganda has he been hearing? Who has lied to him about churches in America?”

I asked him to tell me what he meant and he said, “The churches in America are persecuted by the demon of materialism. Materialism has captured many churches and weakened them so much that they have no spiritual power or true commitment to Christ left! They think only of themselves and their things. If materialism ever got into our churches, it would ruin us and steal our spiritual strength. We could not live and die as faithful followers of Christ if that happened to us.”

Suddenly, with all my degrees in college and seminary, and my years of Bible study, I felt as spiritually deep as dew on the desert floor. I was standing with a man who had truly given everything to Christ in total dedication, and who truly lived by faith in the miraculous power and sovereignty of God. I understood more about the depth of his commitment and the shallowness of mine that night.

We always had a team meeting in the evening. It was a time of sharing testimonies of the work and contacts of the day, singing, scripture reading, and a devotional. The leader of the Iranian Christian Fellowship, Bishop Haik, came that evening and spoke to us. He was a man who glowed with presence of God as he spoke to us!

In his closing remarks, he said, “To be a Christian in this, country means that you are a martyr-in-waiting. You will die for your faith!” All of these believers were walking with a daily faith and commitment that I have rarely seen in America.

Bishop Haik was a prophet. Several months later he was arrested and killed. He died the “Death of a Thousand Cuts”. His naked body, sewn up with fishing string was dumped on the floor of the police station, and his wife was called to come and pick up his body. Over the years, I have received death notices through the American branch of the Iranian Christian Fellowship for many of those who worked with us.

I felt like a spiritual midget among those giants of the faith.

Back to our bus ride to Sanandaj, we enjoyed the decompression of tension as we returned to the city. Not that we were completely out of danger, but we were among crowds of people and moving traffic and you felt less as if a target was on your back. Then we got to our hotel rooms...on the roof of the next building, facing our windows, was a machine gun emplacement with a soldier manning the weapon. Oh, well, pull the curtains, get a shower, and get in a bed that was not a sleeping bag on rocky soil.

But, not until our entire team spent several hours in prayer for the ICF folks we left on duty to finish the work at camp, for the witness we had given to be effective, for the Iranian church, for our safety, and the safety of those who were coming to take us home. All during the prayer meeting and long after I had gone to bed, a young couple’s image was on the prayer screen in my mind.

It was the only married couple who served with us at the camp. He was the one with me in Marivan when the “Slay all Americans” parade came by. He was the one who jerked me into a doorway and had clothes made for me. I asked him what he did for a living and he said, “Many things before, but now I am going to pastor a church! My wife and I will go there from here.” He was radiant with joy and his wife was so excited to be in ministry with her husband. I ask if it was a new church and he told me that it was several years old. I asked where the former pastor had gone and he replied, “He was hanged by the police and God has chosen us to continue the ministry! We feel so honored and grateful!”

Where among American Christians will you find such faith and commitment?

When Jesus said that the first shall be last and the last shall be first, he must have had these third world believers in mind. They have so little, yet they obey and serve God with all they have...and they do it with unspeakable joy! They will surely be first. We American Christians, who have so much, but serve God in a casual or half hearted way, will be last. They will be first and we will be last!

Two days later the LESEA C-130 came to take us home. Our exit was almost as big an event as our arrival. Many of the Iranian Christian Fellowship were there and a lot of people who were evidently not with our group. I reasoned they were waiting for a flight. However, when I called our team to go to the airplane and line up for a picture, a large crowd came to the side of the aircraft to pose for the picture. I thought, "Wow! A lot of the ICF folks must have come from town to bid us goodbye."

Several months later, I was showing the pictures to my son and noticed something strange. I got a magnifying glass and inspected the crowd. When I saw their suits and inspected their faces, I realized they were Iranian Secret Service men who had masqueraded as Kurds in the camp. They were around us all day and probably eavesdropping on our evening team meetings. Death was always at the door, but the prayers of the saints kept him at bay.

We flew back to Cyprus, to England, and home. Our arrival was a three ring circus! No Americans had been to Iran in thirteen years. Every news and television station in Dallas and Fort Worth met us at the airport. We answered their questions but had no way to tell them the story.

Chapter 17

Return to Iran: Bam Earthquake 2004

The leap in time from a 1991 event to an event in 2004 is being made to demonstrate the continuity of ministry God orchestrated in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

A terrible earthquake struck Iran at the ancient city of Bam, Iran on December 26, 2003. Bam was the epicenter. It was a 6.6 magnitude earthquake on the Richter scale! Over 43,000 were killed and 60,000 people became homeless.

In the center of Bam was an enormous citadel that was over 2,000 years old. The fortress was a city in itself, surrounded by high walls. It was made of mud. The homes and buildings in Bam were constructed, mostly, of mud. It was called “The Mud City”.

Most of the homes had high arched ceilings in their center to help combat the heat in the summer. The city and the citadel were flattened in the quake!

The earthquake occurred at 5:27 a.m. Most people were asleep when their house collapsed on them. One man, to whom I spoke, lost twenty-two members of his family. Another family was having a reunion. All seventy-seven members of the extended family were attending and sleeping in the same building. They all died. An entire family was erased in seconds! The grief was like a heavy blanket covering the survivors.

The records show that over 60 countries responded to Iran’s request for help. One group that responded was the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. There were several families of IMB personnel living on Cyprus who worked with Farsi (Persian) speaking people. Their hearts were broken by the reports they were hearing so they approached the Iranian government as Global Partners, a non -governmental aid agency that Mike Stroop had created and used in 1991.

They were given an invitation to provide food service as we had done. Problem: where do they find a team and equipment? They made frantic calls to every Baptist agency they could think of...but, it was Christmas and everybody was out of the office. They prayed and God answered! His answer demonstrated His sense of humor.

One of the men was from Alabama and he had the phone number of a friend who was on the Alabama Baptist State Convention staff. He called him at home and he activated the response they needed. Alabama was one of the few state conventions that had an airlift kitchen.

Texas Baptist Men built the first airlift kitchen in 1990 and used it in 1991 for Kurdish relief in Iran. We left it with the Iranian Christian Fellowship. They were asked to use it in a needy area by the Iranian government. Newer and better planned units were built when we came home. However, the Alabama kitchen, built in 2003, was absolutely fabulous. I had never seen a more well appointed facility that made use of every inch of space and every packing crate served as storage and food preparation tables. The designer included a computer and a food service library.

The Father’s humor was demonstrated in the name, “The Alabama Disaster Kitchen”. The only airlift kitchen available arrived with the first team of responders and when the Iranians read the name on the crates, they pronounced it as, “Allah ba ma”. In Farsi that translates, “God is with us”! So, the group was welcomed with joy as, “The God is with us kitchen crew”!

Do not tell me God does not have a sense of humor!

Our involvement began when the Texas Baptist Men's disaster team was contacted by the North American Mission Board's volunteer department. We were asked to field a team of approximately fifteen men to operate the Alabama Disaster Team's airlift kitchen in Bam, Iran. We were to relieve the Alabama team on January 13, 2004.

Our team had its first briefing at First Baptist Church of Lindale, Texas. We included wives in the meeting. This was very important because the men were being asked to sign a waiver of responsibility by the International Mission Board. This was a dangerous assignment and I wanted the wives to understand that.

The wives formed a prayer support team and a system of communication so everyone would know the latest information and prayer requests. Dr. Kaywin La Noue, "Dr. L." my wife, was the organizer of this system and the prayer support team. Everyone received a folder with maps, packing list for checked bags and for carry-on bags, a team roster with email addresses, information sheets on the country, the culture, the project, their expected behavior, a chain of command chart, flight schedules, and other instructions. A cultural introduction to Iran was given by an Iranian Christian, who had recently been in Iran. His availability at this time was a God thing. I tried to make the wives as much a part of the team as the men because the men are better packed when their wives know the situation and help them.

Our son, Dr. John La Noue, Jr., M.D., (John II) a pediatric surgeon, went to the warehouse of MediSend to obtain surgical equipment. This group sold surplus medical equipment and supplies for \$40.00 per box. He was able to purchase over \$10,000.00 worth of medical supplies for \$380.00. This was another God thing!

While John II was at MediSend, an Iranian came in with a list of medical needs from Tehran. He was a Ph.D., not an M.D., and he had no idea about what he was trying to purchase. John II noticed the problem, and came to his aid. He greeted the Iranian in Farsi and helped him find everything he needed. John II has a strong affinity for languages. Any where he travels, he tries to learn as much of the language as he can.

The man discovered he did not have enough money to pay for everything, so, John II wrote a personal check to cover the rest. This made a tremendous impression on the Iranian! The fact that a Christian doctor would come to the aid of a Muslim group had quite an impact. As a matter of fact, he was so moved that he brought two other Muslim friends to the airport to tell John II goodbye and wish him "Allah speed" on his trip. They made arrangements to contact him when they came to Bam. It was another God thing!

By January 5, requests for water pumps, chlorine pumps, bag filters, UV tubes and crystal chambers, etc. began coming in from the field. It was quite a research project to get the information and descriptions that I needed to obtain the proper parts for the particular water purifiers they were using. They asked for some items by name only, some were easy to find, because they had parts numbers. We discovered that a lot of the requested equipment was already in stock at the Texas Baptist Men's Warehouse. It was another God thing!

The needs lists kept coming from field even while we were in Dubai. This was good, because we had the supplies available in the markets, and it gave us an indication of what was happening on the field. We were able to purchase another entire kitchen with stoves (made in Tehran, by the way), cooking vessels and utensils, and two diesel generator (400 lbs. each . . . and no forklifts were ever available).

Earlier, when I called Tommy Puckett for more equipment information, he asked if I would take three people from the First Baptist Church of Woodstock, GA with my group. He

said that the church had been a supporter of Global Partners and had a great interest, and investment, in the Persian people group. My group was hand picked, highly experienced, well coordinated, and included some who had worked with me in Iran after Desert Storm with Kurdish refugee camps. To add three unknowns to my team when we were going into a country whose motto, for years has been “Satanist America is our arch enemy, death to America, slay all Americans,” was very unusual. However, I instantly felt God’s leadership in adding them. I am glad I did, they were great additions to the team!

Departure time from Texas, on January 9, found us maxed out on luggage and with 15 extra boxes, at \$165.00 each. The arrival in Dubai was later than expected and the Persian Speaking World (PSW) team members had gone to bed. We spent quite a while at the airport searching for an escort . . . then we realized that the man with the “TAXES GROUP” sign was actually looking for us, not for a government or an accounting group!

In our briefing meeting with the PSW team, we discovered that we had received a lot of misinformation, most of this concerned finances. We had already spent several thousand dollars on things requested from the field. This oversight, or miscommunication, is common in disaster situations, because the local personnel are not usually trained for these types of operations.

It has been a common misconception by administrative leadership that the field personnel are the best ones to respond to the disaster situations in their area. No one realizes that the personnel are victims also and need help. At the very least, they need an experienced omnibudsman who can help them think through the situations, lay out the possibilities and resources to help them make decisions which augment, or support their original mission goals. This is not to replace their leadership, or even make decisions, but to be information and experience resources. They need to ask the questions, have you considered . . . who will be responsible for that . . . what steps must be taken to obtain these results . . . what if we did . . . how will this aid your mission goals. . . did you know that these resources are also available. . . is someone registering your group at the embassy. . . who is attending the NGO coordination meetings. . . etc.?

In these situations, no one makes mistakes . . . you just discover better ways to do it next time. Everyone is doing the best they can and no one knows all the forces that were vectored into the situation at the instant the decision had to be made. Experience helps you look at the situation as it is presented, realizing that it may change instantly, so, plan for all possible contingencies . . . be fluid, not just flexible.

We had a shopping frenzy in “Do Buy”! More requests had come from the field. I sent eighteen men shopping in all directions. Keeping track of the cash receipts became a nightmare. I was very grateful for Mike Harwood, from Corsicana, Texas, who had given me extra money before I left Texas. This was not the first time he had come to the aid of a mission for the Lord! Praise the Lord for such people that share with others in Jesus name.

The way the project was initiated on the ground in Bam, Iran, demonstrates the fact that God is always active around us and He is never caught by surprise. His fore knowledge has His people positioned for action. Their immediate response to His call is essential. The following account is a testimony to this truth.

There was an IMB missionary living in Greece. He was on vacation in France when the emergency call came for a response in Iran. He took his family back to Athens and went to Iran. This IMB staff member was uniquely equipped for the assignment. Abraham Shepherd was born in Lebanon, educated in Canada and the US. He is fluent in four languages and their ten dialects,

and is conversationally fluent in four other languages. Arabic and Farsi (Persian) are in the group. But, the most remarkable thing about him is not his cultural diversity or his linguistic ability; it was his courage and dependency on the power of God!

In the beginning, the Iranians called a meeting of all the responding organizations in the edge of the city of Bam. They met in a tent with carpets over the sand, with everyone sitting, cross-legged on the carpets, and everyone was prepared to tell how they could help the refugees. Mercy Corps, World Vision, CARE, and others were present. These are all faith-based groups which operate as NGO's (Non –Governmental Organizations).

The meeting was led by the Muslim Mullah who controlled Kerman Province in which Bam was located, and his interpreter. One by one, he interviewed each group leader, asking who they were, who sponsored them, their purpose, their skills and ability to help in the earthquake, what equipment they brought, and what resources did they have in reserve? No one mentioned they were a Christian group or that they were sponsored by Christians.

He motioned to Abraham to begin his response. Abraham said that his group was Global Partners, a Christian group and that he was a Christian who had come to help the people of Iran. The effect was electric! Everyone jerked in a spasm of disbelief! Abraham had admitted that he was a Christian! The other representatives from the various NGOs thought he was crazy and must have a death wish. Didn't he realize he was in the Islamic Republic of Iran? Some of them looked at him as if to say, "You idiot! Do you realize where you are and to whom you are speaking?"

The Mullah paused and took a long look at Abraham. He stood up and told Abraham to follow him outside. Everyone froze. Abraham stood up and followed him out of the tent. He was thinking and praying, "I may be walking to my death. Father, I am in your hands, just take care of my family if I die for you."

The Mullah said, "Get in my car."

Abraham thought, "This is bad! I guess this is it!"

The Mullah got in and sat beside him. He looked him in the eyes and said, "We are not stupid! We know that most of these NGOs are Christian organizations. They have been lying to us by not admitting this. You are the first one to tell me the truth! I admire your courage. You are the first honest one of these people I have seen. I am going to put you in charge of the refugee camp because you can be trusted. You risked your life to tell me the truth. You decide which of these groups can serve in the camp. You will be the second in command under my assistant, who will be the camp commander."

After Abraham got out of the car, the Mullah was driven away. His assistant and interpreter took Abraham back into the tent and announced his assignment. The NGO representatives were shocked by the outcome of his courage!

Lesson learned: when you absolutely trust God in extreme circumstances, He is absolutely able to respond to you in an extreme way to meet your needs and bring glory to Him in the process!

The Alabama Baptist Disaster team had the difficulty of setting up the kitchen and the team's camp. Just the journey from Alabama to Dubai, chartering a Russian freight/passenger flight to Bam, Iran, and hand loading the cargo on the charter plane was an exhausting operation. But, arriving in Bam, having to unload the cargo by hand, travel in trucks to the camp, setting up the crew's tents in a howling wind which blew sand into everything, and setting up the kitchen to feed several thousand people was extremely tough. This is why our disaster protocol calls for

the original strike team to set up the equipment and facilities, run a short term in food service and, then, to be relieved.

Our Texas Baptist Men's group was the relief team.

I called the air charter company and asked about available aircraft for a charter to Bam. They said they had two aircraft that could be configured for a combination freight and passenger flight. One plane had a charter price of \$18,000 and the other was \$14,000. I asked what the difference was in the two airplanes. The reply was, "There is more wire and duct tape on the \$14,000 plane."

I have been a pilot since 1954 and have held a commercial pilot's license since 1964. My personal aircraft at the time of our disaster response was a 1946 Luscombe with fabric covered wings, a 1953 all metal Luscombe and a 1954 Cessna 180 bush plane with large Agwagon wheels. I was very familiar with baling wire and duct tape. I chose the \$14,000 flight.

We loaded the cargo, which included one of the diesel generators, by hand. The aircraft was an old Russian Ilyushin 16. The original piston engines had been replaced by turboprops. The seats for our crew were in the tail of the plane and our cargo was strapped to the 25 feet of cabin floor between us and the cockpit. Sandwiches and cold drinks were in cardboard boxes on the deck behind us.

As we fastened our seatbelts, my son said, "Smell that odor? The last cargo they hauled was a load of goats and they did not flush the belly of the plane." He was right!

My son accompanied me on the first disaster response of our mobile disaster unit in 1971, when he was nine years old. His work was explained in an earlier chapter. Now we were on a disaster mission together thirty-three years later...and there had been many in between. He was a member of the Royal Ambassador boy's mission education organization in 1971 and now he was a pediatric surgeon. John II was an instructor in trauma surgery at Southwestern Medical School and Parkland Hospital when he felt God's leadership to become a pediatric surgeon. He had also worked as an emergency room physician for two years while he was doing medical research. God had uniquely prepared him for disaster medical service.

The other physician on the team was Dr. Kerfoot Walker, a retired internist who had served many years as a public health doctor. Dr. Walker had been one of John's mentors since childhood. They were quite a team! Dr. Walker and his wife are both internist and have spent years as volunteer medical workers in many parts of the world. In 1991, they set up and operated the medical facility in northern Iraq when the Kurds returned home after Desert Storm. This was while I was in Iran with the Kurdish refugees.

Our plane landed in Bam and taxied to the terminal. I told the team to stay on the plane and watch what happened to me before deplaning. As I descended the stairs, I was met by a policeman who demanded my papers. He asked what we were doing in Iran. I told him we were the crew to operate the Alabama disaster kitchen. He shouted, "Allah ba ma kitchen? Welcome to Bam!" He gave me a bear hug and kissed me on both cheeks! It was a lot better than the automatic weapon reception in 1991! Thank God for Alabama Baptists!

By the time we unloaded the plane, loaded the trucks, and drove to the camp the Alabama team was hurrying to leave. The plane had a limited amount of time it could remain at the airport and they did not want to miss it! Normally we spend a day with the crew for debriefing and introduction to their methods of operation. We barely had time to introduce ourselves and pray for their safe trip home; a total of thirty minutes! But, because of Abraham, our entry was smooth and well coordinated. Our acquaintance with and previous disaster response work with the Alabama team aided in the handoff, and the similarities in our equipment was very helpful.

Abraham introduced us to the eight Iranian Christians who were helping the Alabama team and would be helping us until their replacements arrived in a few days. Then he explained how they had been operating. The ICF team consisted of four men and four women. This meant we had to observe a strict Muslim protocol in our work and in our personal relationships.

The men had to avoid being near the women's tent. If we worked together, there could be no touching to help each other. When food serving time came, the refugees formed two lines. One line was for the women who came for their family's ration and one for the men. The women served the women and the men served the men. We had to avoid being near the women's tent if their door was not shut. We had to have our worship outside if we were together.

Sleeping bags were used at night, but, due to the daily sand storms, you had to cover them with a blanket when you left them for the day or they would be full of sand that night. The nights were freezing cold, but working with the stoves during the day was a hot job. We were in and out of our jackets all day long. We frequently had to use our bandana handkerchiefs as dust masks. Keeping the grit out of the food was a major priority!

One of the ICF men was a great cook! He was able to cook massive amounts of food with the local flavor. The very large stoves and pots we brought enabled him to increase the kitchen's output of food to match the growing demand. Several things were increasing the demand on the food service. One was the addition of a new camp being constructed in the area. It was being added to daily. We eventually were asked to build a kitchen in that camp to care for the demand. The two camps required 6,000 meals twice each day.

Another factor was the news was spreading about our refugee camps, where there was food, shelter, and water. Many small villages around Bam had been hit as hard as Bam, but the Iranian leaders had not taken them into consideration. The survivors from these villages began flocking in to our camps.

A school was started in a large tent near us. Abraham had placed the kitchen in the perfect place. The kitchen was out of the traffic area, yet, close enough for easy access to food service. He placed the other aid groups on the other side of our group staging area. The Iranian army put their camp behind us giving us a protected perimeter. Our clinic tent was also behind the kitchen between the army and our back door.

This was a great place for it because so many of the soldiers had lacerations and other injuries to be treated. John II said, "Dad, I have sewed up so many Iranian soldiers I think I will send their government a bill." One man came into camp with his scalp severely lacerated. John II ran to the Medicin Sans Frontier doctor's tent and traded some antibiotics for more lydacaine, returned and stitched him up. When he finished bandaging his head, John removed his own ball cap and put it on his head over the wounded area to protect it. The man went ballistic with joy. John II did not know what it meant to the man in that culture, for him to take his own hat and give it to him for protection.

God was at work. The man was in charge of the heavy equipment for the area. He came back with a back hoe tractor and helped move stuff; he came on a bulldozer and leveled our staging area. When it came time for us to leave, he brought a truck for our luggage and a bus for the team! It pays to have friends in low places.

Our team provided snacks and lunch for the school children...and lots of tea! Everyone in camp knew that our teapot was always open for business! The people were constantly coming for a cup or bowl of tea. This provided an opportunity for personal contact.

They had been taught that America was the great Satan and Americans were evil, greedy, disciples of the great Satan, Yet, they found us loving them, old white men working to serve them, giving them free food, serving them hot tea around the clock, and always serving with a smile. This really opened their hearts toward us!

Now let me tell you the other side of the story.

We were so well received and well liked it gave the authorities an embarrassing problem. We were too popular to be run out of camp. No one could do our job. Yet, there was constant pressure on the camp leaders from the rulers in Tehran to get us out of the country. Our lives and ministry made their lying about America very evident.

When the Alabama team left, the authorities were amazed by their work...and their reception. So, they began to clamp down on our group to squeeze us out or find reason to make us leave. However, we had two secret weapons, our age and prayer! As a matter of fact, in my tent, I had prepared an area with a mat, which was my place of prayer. Anytime there was a problem, a need, a disturbance, confusion, conflict, danger, supply problem, a stressed worker, or a relationship that needed attention; I would go to my tent. There I would get on my knees, with my face to the ground and seek the Father's face first and then His hand.

Without fail, problems were solved, needs were met, disturbances were quelled, wisdom covered confusion, resolution came to conflict, danger was met with courage, supplies were available, stresses relieved, and relationships were anointed with unity.

The only way to lead a team like this, on a project like this, in a country like this, is on your knees. After all, this project was His, not ours. Therefore, we sought to be obedient instead of successful by our terms. You see, It really was a God thing!

My son was the youngest of our group at 42 years old. The others were from 60 to 75 years old. I was 70. When the group got off the plane and all but one had gray hair and/or a gray beard, Abraham prayed, "Oh, God! Why did you send me such a group of old men? Surely at their age they cannot keep up with the work to be done. Lord, this is a mess!" He did not know that our group of "old men" were work hardened old characters, well trained and highly experienced disaster relief workers who were tough as a leather boot, and were able to work 18 hours a day... with a smile all the while. He also did not realize that when the Iranians saw us, they said, "This bunch of old men are too old to be CIA, FBI, or spies! They are probably harmless. We will let them work, but we will watch them very closely."

The Islamic Seminary, a very fundamental Muslim school, was located to our north. Some of our "inspectors" and "visitors" were from that facility. We had to be on alert at all times and refer everyone to Abraham if they asked questions. Our job was to keep working and keep smiling. But it did not always work out as planned.

Every day, at varying times, a man would come with four other men. He was a loud, demanding, and pushy inquisitor. He always wanted to know where everyone on the team was immediately. He wanted to be sure that none of us were out among the people.

One afternoon he came wearing his friendliest face and asking to borrow some western magazines. I told him we did not have any magazines, books, or western newspapers with us.

He kept pushing, "You must have some! What are your people reading?"

I replied, "Look at my workers they are old, they work from before daylight until after dark. When the work is done they go to bed and sleep. I would not let them bring books and magazines. They have no time for reading!"

He stepped back, looked around the kitchen at my crew, grunted, and walked away.

My experience in Iran during desert storm paid off. American printed material was considered Satanist propaganda. To import it could mean a death sentence.

Every few days the camp commander called a meeting of all the NGO representatives. We would gather in the same tent that served as a headquarters for the Mullah's staff. The people sat around the tent wall in a cross-legged manner, being careful not to let anyone see the bottom of their shoe or the sole of their foot. That would have been an insult!

The meeting would begin with a message of gratitude, then there would be a question and answer time to surface and solve camp problems. There would be a message from the Mullah explaining the latest news and situation update. After the first week of meetings there was always a very polite, gracious, explanation of why we would not be needed soon, so make preparations to close our kitchen and leave.

The exchange would go like this:

Camp Director: "Your workers have done a good work for the people and we are grateful. At this point, however, we have provided a tent for every family and your service will not be needed soon. You should make preparations to return to your home."

John La Noue: "My team and I are grateful to you and the Islamic Republic of Iran for the privilege of serving your people. You have been so kind to us and so helpful (They brought us a pickup truck load of bread every day. The bread looked like a thin pizza crust and was about eighteen inches in diameter). We will be happy to return to our homes and families at your direction. You have been kind to your people by giving them a shelter tent. When we remove our kitchen, will they have a stove in their tent for cooking?"

Camp Director (Looking at the other group leaders): "Are any of you distributing stoves? (All the leaders would give a negative response). Dr. La Noue, there are still some problems to be solved. We will need you awhile longer."

They found stoves later. In the next meeting, the exchange was identical except they had stoves. So, I told them how wonderful they were to their people and to us and asked, "Do the families have cooking pots?"

Camp Director to the group leaders: "Are any of you distributing cooking pots? (All of the leaders would give a negative response)."

We were told to stay.

In the next meeting, the exchange was the same except they had pots. I asked about water buckets for dishes and sanitation.

We stayed.

In the next meeting, the exchange was the same except they now had buckets. I asked about food for each family.

We stayed.

No food came. It was an enormous expense to feed 6,000 people twice a day.

Our group stayed for two more team changes, which was over a month. By that time the Iranian Christian Fellowship workers were capable of handling the food service.

The "inspector," who was constantly trying to find some reason to attack us, came storming into our camp late the evening before we left. He stomped through our entire operation and living area checking his list of our team. Some of our people were doing clean up, some were arranging food to cook for the morning meal, and some were resting. He looked in the clinic tent and saw only one doctor, Dr. Walker. He charged up to Abraham shouting, "Where is the doctor?" repeatedly at the top of his voice. He was red faced and furious!

Abraham had a look of panic on his face. He asked me, "Where is Dr. John?"

I told him that he had gone with an Iranian doctor to donate about \$10,000 worth of surgical instruments to the local hospital. Abraham shouted at me that he should not have left the camp without checking with him! He was angry and frightened.

The man stormed through the entire camp yelling at the top of his voice, “Where is the doctor? I want him here right now” repeatedly!

John II came back while he was still storming and yelling. My son has the gift of remaining calm in any storm and he walked up to the angry inspector calmly, with a smile and said, “Here I am. May I help you?”

“Where have you been?” he screamed at John II.

“One of your wonderful doctors took me to the local clinic you are building and I donated \$10,000 worth of my surgical instruments. Here is the receipt.”

The inspector looked stunned. He quietly read the receipt, paused, and asked John II, “May I see you in the clinic tent?”

Abraham still looked very worried.

The inspector came from the clinic tent with a smile on his face and speaking quietly with John II. After he left, Abraham asked John II what had happened.

John II smiled and said, “He had a bad case of acid reflux. We had nothing in our pharmacy kit to help him. I told him that I have the same problem and I would give him my medicine because I did not want him to suffer. He looked surprised and started smiling. He thanked me and left.”

Abraham looked relieved but emotionally drained.

I called him in Athens, Greece, to interview him for this chapter. When I asked about the incident, he said that when they found someone was missing from our camp, they began to discuss whether or not they should kill all of us immediately. I did not need to know that.

The air charter company contacted me about the flight from Bam to Dubai. I ordered the \$18,000 charter. I learn very quickly.

Realizing the difficulty with our inability to brief the incoming team, I wrote a very extensive and detailed report and instruction manual.

Let me shift once more to another important part of the story.

As I related in the previous chapter, the prophet Daniel was told of the strong, evil spirit that was over Persia (Iran). Our work there in 1991 was accomplished only through God’s sovereign power working with and through men whose hearts were totally committed to Him. It took nine days of prayer for God to move us into a situation of confession, brokenness, and cleansing before He would empower us for the mission.

The Texas team knew the story. They studied the wonderful booklet “Spiritual Preparation for Working in Disaster” and internalized the message. Texas Baptist Men brought prayer power to the project by calling on every church in the Baptist General Convention of Texas to pray continually for us. My wife, “Dr. L”, has a ministry of prayer. Although she has a Ph. D. in education administration, her calling now is to be a prayer warrior. She spends hours each day with her note book of prayer requests and prayer needs. I knew that she would be in prayer for me during the actual hours of my daily activities in Iran.

For years, if we are not together on a mission as I mentioned in an earlier chapter, we set a time to pray the same prayer at the same time for each other. It is sometimes called “The Breastplate of St. Francis”. That will probably surprise some of my Baptist buddies...but so be it. Prayer was the wind beneath our wings. It was the fortress of our protection. It was the

source of our provision. It was the provider of our wisdom and God was the source of our power.

Lesson learned...lesson applied.

When you are in a situation where you are walking the razor's edge between life or death, it is God that protects you from dangers you cannot see and gives you protection for which you did not know to ask. I have realized this truth: If serving Him should cause my death, it would not be simply a period signaling the end of the story, but it would be an exclamation mark at the end of my story of living for Him.

The Iranian Christian Fellowship brothers and sisters who worked with us were my teachers.

They knew that if they worked with us they would be under great scrutiny and would be in danger after we left.

The brother who drove our truck and bought all the food we served was the pastor of an Iranian church in Turkey. He came to help his people. Every day he traveled to the nearest unaffected city to buy food for our camp, and every day he was followed by the police. They began stopping him and interrogating him daily. One night in our prayer meeting, he confessed his fear of being arrested, perhaps even killed because he was working with us. The Iranian team surrounded him, laid hands on him, prayed for him, and loved him. He said it was not death that he feared, but he was worried about his wife and children's care. The group said that he should not worry because they would provide for them. With a broad smile, he clapped his hands and said, "Alright! Let's get to work!"

Such commitment and dedication had a profound effect on me...how could I do less?

A few weeks after the project ended, 50 of those who helped us were arrested and held in jail for over a month.

During the project, we had daily devotions as a group with hymns and scripture reading. These were held in the open space in front of our tents, morning and evening. This was an opportunity for those around us to hear the scripture.

Our departure day arrived and the plane taking us to Dubai would also bring the new team. People in the camp realized we were leaving and they surrounded us to tell us goodbye. Some were weeping saying that no one would care for them as we had and begged us not to leave. The school teachers came by weeping and thanking us for our kindness to the children...and for loving them. They had a special program for us in the school to thank us.

John II's laceration patient came with a truck for our luggage and a bus for the team. The plane had landed an hour earlier giving the new team time to unload and process through customs. The police held the new team away from us and would not let us communicate with them. Finally they let us line up in the parking lot facing each other about five yards apart. I had to give my operations manual to a policeman, who, in turn, gave it to the new team leader.

We had a short shouted prayer for them and they left for camp.

Once we were on the plane, I took some paper cups from our aircraft's cardboard lunch box, a bottle of grape juice and a folded loaf of flatbread from my day pack and we observed the Lord's Supper on the airport taxiway. The bottle of grape juice was a minor miracle. I bought it in Dubai before we went to Iran. I bought it just for the occasion of having the remembrance on Iranian soil. The miracle was I did not drink it on those dry dusty days!

The team arrived at our hotel in Dubai and was led through one of the best debriefings I have ever experienced in disaster relief work. The International Mission Board team was superb!

After the sessions were over, I went roaming in the hotel which was like a small town since it connected to a shopping mall. Two things I do not trust in foreign countries beside the water, are ground meat and milk products. Being a hamburger and ice creamaholic, foreign travel is tough. When I come home from a project overseas, I get through the customs inspection, walk outside, salute the flag, kiss the ground, and go get a Whataburger!

God is so good! His word says in Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." I found a McDonald's restaurant and a shop that had Bluebell ice cream from Brenham, Texas, in the hotel basement!

Our trip home was an exhausting series of flights across ten time zones and blessed with perfect timing! In London, we had three hours and fifteen minutes to go through passport control, collect our luggage, go through customs, buy a bus ticket, wait for a bus, ride from Heathrow Airdrome across London to the Gatwick Airdrome, recheck our luggage, go through passport control, go through security at three different stops, and get to the gate just in time to hear, "Flight 2384 for Dallas is now boarding!" Our wives had set their alarms to wake up and pray for us during the time we were making this connection. This was a God thing!

We were met at the Dallas-Ft. Worth Airport by radio, TV, and news reporters. We answered their questions but could not tell them the whole story...and even this account does not tell it all. Every man on the team has a story all his own.

Chapter 18

New York City: 9/11/01

Sleeping late had become one of my favorite sports in retirement. After a year of cancer surgery, radiation, and chemo-hormone injections it took longer to get fired up in the morning. I was relaxing in bed when the telephone rang. It was my daughter, Lydia, in New Jersey calling with an anxious tone in her voice. She said, "Daddy, a terrible thing has happened! An airplane has just crashed into the World Trade Center in New York."

I thought about what she had said and replied, "Darling, there is an air traffic corridor that goes down the Hudson River; I imagine it was foggy and a private airplane strayed into the building. I remember after World War II when one of our bombers hit the Empire State Building and crashed."

She replied, "I am watching the scene on Television, it's all over the news! The weather is clear and there is a big hole in the side of the building. Oh, Daddy! I just saw an airliner crash into the second tower!"

I instantly recognized the pattern and I knew that we were under terrorist attack. Their pattern is to make a disturbance, or an attack, then when the first responders come, and the crowds gather, to set off the second attack or explosion to kill as many first responders and civilians as they can.. I told her, "We are under terrorist attack and we cannot be sure what else is going to happen. Immediately go to the food store and stock up with food, water, and batteries; fill all vehicles with fuel, and fill both bathtubs with water. "I felt a great sense of urgency and concern for her and her family, because they lives an hour and a half from New York, thirty minutes from Philadelphia, and two hours north of Washington DC. If all three of these were hit in the same attack, she would be bracketed and perhaps locked down.

As the news developed through the morning, the Pentagon was hit, and the fourth flight crashed in Pennsylvania. I called the Texas Baptist Men Disaster Relief Headquarters and ask about the status of our response alert. I was told it was "yellow" (on alert, but unassigned) because TBM had not heard from the North American Mission Board's National Disaster Volunteer Center. I had been retired for a year and an half from TBM and my wife and I were active volunteers for both TBM and NAMB organizations.

I called the NAMB volunteer center in Atlanta, GA and told the director, Mickey Caison, that we were available. He said, "Pack your bags, come to Atlanta, I need you both in the disaster volunteer center"

After a week of enlisting and organizing response teams, we were replaced in Atlanta. Mickey told us to go home, get our motor home and pack for an extended stay in New York. Our actual responsibilities would be made after we were on location.

Everything is always in flux during the early days of a disaster. As a responder, we must be more than flexible, we must be fluid. This means that our duties may vary from being a kitchen helper to on site director of the whole operation.

NAMB had established a base at the Brooklyn Naval Yard, that contained a mobile kitchen, laundry unit, shower unit and a large parking area for eighteen wheel tractor freight vans for storage, refrigerated trailers for the kitchen, and an area for crew travel trailers and motor homes.

In major disasters a staging area "off site" must be established where people and equipment can come until they are called "on site". All of our volunteers had to come to this site and have picture I.D. badges made. The Raritan Valley Baptist Church in Edison, New Jersey was the site chosen.

I met their chairman of deacons and he expressed his excitement for the church to have a part in the disaster response. I asked about their pastor and he said he had resigned earlier. He said they were searching for a new pastor. I told him I had frequently been an interim pastor for churches in their situation. The next week I was asked to be their interim for the duration of our service in New York. It was a blessed ministry!

In addition to being one of the Southern Baptist Disaster relief workers, I was a chaplain for the Cherokee County Sheriff's Department in Texas. I always carried my badge and credentials in case of an emergency. I also carried some of the shoulder patches from the Department with me as well. It is customary to trade patches with other law enforcement agencies with whom you work.

Driving our motor home in New York traffic was interesting to say the least. We found the Brooklyn Naval Yard and set up our unit. Security was so tight that we were issued three badges from; the Southern Baptist Disaster Service, the American Red Cross, and the New York Police Department.

The basic work on site was to help feed the workers, assist the Salvation Army with staff for their "Ground Zero" kitchen and care for the 150 Baptist volunteers who came each week to assist with clean up.

Mickey Caison came to see us on site. He said he had a manager for the clean-up operation and ask us to manage the Baptist Disaster Base, and then he looked me straight in the eyes, "I have a very special request for you from Major Rudolph Giuliani. He said I want you to think about it, before you give me an answer. He said the Baptist churches in Oklahoma City who had worked the Murrow Building Disaster said that so many people had sent them "Teddy Bears" as a show of sympathy and comfort that they wanted to do the same thing for New York. When word got out that they were sending 'Teddy Bears', "Teddy Bears" started coming from everywhere.

The Mayor says that he has a big problem with over 40,000 teddy bears in a warehouse and more still coming. "John, he needs help with his teddy bear problem. Will you take on the project?"

I shouted, "Teddy bears! All these broken places and hurting people and you want us to work with teddy bears?"

He asked, "Will you?"

I said, "Yes, on one condition and that is that you do not tell my buddies in Texas that I came to New York to mess with teddy bears." I accepted the job with his promise of confidentiality.

Dr. L and I had no idea about the ministry He was opening for us. Lesson learned: always accept God given assignments without trying to assign them a level of importance. When God shows you where He is working and invites you to join Him don't try to evaluate, just cooperate.

We selected a team of six bear handlers, rented a Ryder truck and began taking teddy bears out of warehouses in New York and New Jersey. We had to bring them to our base to be sorted. Some of the bears had too much oatmeal on them to be distributed, some had missing parts, and others were too dirty to be sanitary. All of the bears that we rejected were crated and

sent with a mission organization to Haiti for the children. In Haiti, these were a “God send” to children who had never even had a toy. Many of the teddy bears had notes attached addressed to firemen, policemen, and families of victims. These notes were all attached to the bears we distributed. We took some to fire stations, to the Victims Family Service Center, and police stations. We had 1,500 Care Bears with movable casts and bandages. We place these with the New York City Emergency Medical Services (EMS) for their ambulances to use on pediatric calls. We took 100 prayer bears to a hospital pediatric ward.

I went to the city temporary Emergency Operations Center (EOC), located on a pier in the Hudson River. It was next to the pier where the Victims Family Service Center was located. As I approached the guard at the door, he stopped me and ask me who I was and what I wanted? When I told him I was with Southern Baptist Disaster Relief; he said that I couldn’t come in there, but was to go next door to the Victims Family Service Center. I pointed to my badge on my belt and said I was also with the Cherokee County Sheriff’s Department in Texas. He stood up and shook my hand, welcomed me to the center and toll me that the New York Sheriff’s Department was at the back of the building.

As I talked to the New York deputies and told them I was a chaplain they expressed a desire for prayer and welcomed me as one of their own.

I told them about the teddy bear distribution and they begged me to bring them some. From then on I had complete freedom and access to every facet of the disaster operation. NYPD ask for a supply of the bears to use when they called on victim’s families. We kept refilling a refrigerator box with bears everyday. I was constantly being pulled aside with requests for counseling and prayer.. It was not unusual for police to pull my truck over and ask me to get into their squad car to pray. When we delivered the bears to the fire stations where so many firemen had been lost, there was always request for prayer.

One humorous incident occurred. My truck was stopped at a check point. A tall Army lieutenant, he was at least 6’4’ tall, approached with his M 16 weapon. He asked me where I was going with the truck and I told him I was going to the EOC. Then he asked what was in the truck? When I told him teddy bears, he stepped back with his M 16 at ready and said, “Don’t lie to me! What is in this truck?” When I repeated teddy bears, he told me to get out and open the truck. I raised the tail gate door on my 16 foot truck and he saw all of the black vacuum packed bags. He pointed to one and said, “Open it!” I cut the bag open and he exclaimed, “My Goodness! These are teddy bears.”

I said, “Yes, Sir, we deliver these to the law enforcement, fire departments, and the Family Center, they distribute them to the victim’s families.” He stepped back, cradled his weapon in his arm and asked, “Can I have one?”

I replied, “Take your pick!”

The lieutenant walked back to his post with his M-16 under one arm and his teddy bear under the other.

Our 150 Baptist workers, who came each week, were housed in the Navy brig. The brig was now a New York City jail, but they gave us the third floor for a dormitory. These volunteers were cleaning apartments in the buildings around “Ground Zero”. Windows in all of the apartments had been blown out and there was a thick coat of toxic dust over everything in the apartments. Our volunteers had to wear special disposable coveralls, heavy industrial masks, hoods and gloves. The apartment owners were being charged \$6,000 to \$12,000 to clean each apartment by commercial firms. Our volunteers cleaned over 750 apartments free.

Many New Yorkers around “Ground Zero” came to appreciate and respect those Southern Baptist in their yellow disaster jackets, who came to their aid in a time of crises.

The impact of the teddy bear ministry opened doors for witnessing, spiritual counseling, and a ministry of prayer that would have been absolutely impossible otherwise.

While we were there an airliner crashed on Long Island. The Federal Aviation Administration and the city of New York ask us to come to the conference for victim’s families and set up a room for children with our teddy bears.

We put two enormous teddy bears by the doorway and lined teddy bears completely around the room on the floor and filled a baby bed with bears. Children of the victim’s were carried for in this room, while the adults were in the conference. At the close of the conference the extra teddy bears were distributed to the families. On a television news cast that evening, the wife of one of the victims was ask if she was helped by the conference. She said, “Yes, they were so nice to us and so helpful. They even gave me a teddy bear to hug.”

The depth of the impact of the teddy bear ministry was really brought home when the space shuttle Columbia, exploded over Texas. The NASA Space Center at Houston held a memorial service to honor the crew. At the ceremony, a New York Police official spoke. He said that one of the things which encouraged them so much were the response of people from across the nation to their heartbreak and tragedy. New Yorkers often feel isolated from the rest of the nation. But, he went on to say that the expression of love, concern, and prayer for us was illustrated with the teddy bears. Many of the teddy bears had notes that said, “We love you!” He went on to say that as an expression of New York’s understanding and compassion for NASA’s lost,” I want to give you my teddy bear which meant so much to me.!”

We served in New York City for over three months. The work there had many facets. The clean up work , feeding workers, and the teddy bear ministry were the three most visible aspects of the disaster ministry. But, even a greater ministry was conducted beneath the radar of the casual observer. The impact of 150 volunteers a week for about thirteen weeks working and bearing witness of the Lord in New York City is where the real ministry of evangelism was conducted.

Lesson learned: never try to evaluate God’s assignment for you, just be obedient and leave the results to Him.

Chapter 19

North Korea: Burden on My Heart

The orient had never been a focus of ministry for me. My early childhood in Louisiana and the immersion in the French language and Cajun culture enabled me to pick up a basic usage of French. My Bachelor degree in English was coupled with a double minor in Spanish and sociology. Culturally and linguistically I was oriented toward Spanish and French speaking areas.

The Texas Baptist Men's organization organized their members in various fellowships or affinity groups. I was responsible for the Aviation Fellowship, the Agricultural Fellowship, the Hispanic Fellowship, and others.

The Korean Baptist Men's Fellowship brought a desperate need to TBM for an agricultural project in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea. This was a miraculous opening for a witness in a country normally closed to foreigners!

Bob Dixon, my boss, assigned it to my agricultural fellowship. This put the two groups together as an integrated project development group.

We met together, planned together, and prayed together. Bob switched the group to my list of fellowship responsibilities.

One of the members of the Ag Fellowship, Dewayne Williams, had previously dropped by my office, stuck his head in my doorway, and laughingly said, "I am retiring from the United States Department of Agriculture. If you ever need an old broken down soil scientist call me!" He had worked all over the world and had written stacks and stacks of soil reports and studies. I heard him laugh out loud as he walked down the hall. He was thinking, "Who would ever need a soil scientist in mission work?"

Less than a month later, I called him and asked, "Dewayne, can you go to North Korea and do some soil testing?"

I could sense his shock when he answered, "Huh?" When the shock wore off and I explained the request from the Korean Men, he was eager to take the assignment!

Two problems were evident on the farm in the DPRK, which had requested help. A part of the farm had been reclaimed from the ocean floor by a dike system and had a high salinity problem. Another part of the farm had the top soil washed away by flood waters and had soil nutrient problems.

This project was not in the budget the TBM board of directors had approved, so, we had to proceed on "faith financing". That meant pray long, hard, and often.

We did!

God responded!

The need was met!

Dewayne designed a complete soil testing laboratory for agricultural land. It was expensive! He designed it to fit in water and chemical proof containers for portability and protection. Some of the chemicals had to be packaged in special ways before the airlines would transport them. As a matter of fact, it took a lot of prayer and negotiations at the airport to get the lab on a plane. It was an act of God to get it accepted!

The project was so successful it opened a door for a continuing ministry. Dewayne's expertise, knowledge, equipment, and his humble, gentle, personality disarmed the hostility and

doubt he originally faced. After all, our two countries are still at war technically. And, he was behind enemy lines!

His work opened a door of ministry and a spirit of trust which is still open and active today.

His report to TBM included pictures which would break a farmer's heart. Barren fields of gravel which had been fertile, crop producing land. Other fields were covered in two to three feet of sand, burying the fertile top soil.

All of this damage had been done by weeks of torrential rains which turned streams into roaring rivers, and rivers into raging flood waters that swept away everything in its path. These were pictures of devastation!

Being able to translate what I saw into the resulting starvation and misery that would occur is one of my gifts and one of my problems.

My heart began to feel the burden for the people. The more I prayed for the situation and the suffering of the people, the heavier the burden on my heart. I knew God was loading me up for a greater involvement in the situation. Little did I realize what He was planning!

One of the lessons I have learned about walking with God is to let Him lead. Another part of that lesson is to not be slow in following Him. Just hang on and try to keep up!

When we began the single farm project, we had no idea about how to work with the DPRK. We let our Korean – American Baptist men take the lead. Suddenly, the operation began to accelerate so quickly that things seem to be happening simultaneously! The DPRK discovered our usefulness, our desire to serve, our expertise, and our congenial manner of relating to them. They discovered that we were not treating them as inferior people just because they needed our help, or as enemies, and we did not make their country look bad in our reports and interviews in the US.

Dewayne's display of the fruits of the Spirit in his life and relations with them made an awesome impact. After all love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are not characteristics which generate conflict. He won their hearts and left the door of ministry wide open!

We were nearing the Christmas holidays. The Baptist Building and all the BGCT operations take a week off for Christmas and the New Year's celebration. I received a call from Rev. Han Bong Hee, Dr. Benjamin Kim, and, Rev. Yoo J. Yoon just before leaving, in which they insisted I join them that night for a message and video from a man who had just returned from the DPRK. I sensed that the Holy Spirit was compelling me to go with them.

Honestly, it was the last thing I wanted to do. My farm home was 87 miles from the office, I was tired, and all I wanted to do was go home and vegetate on the couch in front of my fireplace for 24 hours. I wanted to rest so I could spend a week doing my farm chores. It had been a hard year and I was tired.

But, their insistent, enthusiastic pleadings, plus the urging of the Holy Spirit won the day and I went...leaving skid marks all the way! What I saw that night broke my heart! Hundreds of thousands, if not a million or more people were facing starvation! My heart melted as I saw frail, elderly, women on their knees trying to pick up grains of rice or corn from the cracks in the road, or out of the gravel by the road. People collecting vegetation from the mountainsides to dry and cook, and all sorts of foraging activities being conducted left an indelible impression on my heart.

Pictures of frail, starving children, skeletal people trying to work the farms, and other pitiful scenes blew my Christmas celebration out the window. I would be eating more in one

meal than they would have in a week. One of the speakers was Dr. Kim from the Yanbian University of Science and Technology. He moved my heart deeply with his description of the conditions in the wake of the series of natural disasters which had devastated the country.

I thought to myself, "Ok, heart cinch up your cargo saddle. You are going to be carrying a load!"

My trip home was sad. The road kept blurring with my tears. My entire holiday became a prayer vigil for the North Korean people. This was a major disaster and I felt so helpless.

How could I help feed these thousands of people...this was a God sized challenge.

What do you do with a God sized problem? Give it to God, of course! He is never surprised by an event, He is never caught unprepared, and He is always inviting us to join Him in His work. I committed the problem to Him and became eager for the holidays to end, so I could join God in what He was about to do. He convicted me of my need to stand in the gap in prayer for the people of the DPRK.

I shared the growing burden of hunger and suffering with our office staff when I returned. Bob showed an increasing desire to find some way to help. All of our office staff, everyone was a prayer warrior, picked up the burden in prayer. But, the one who actually put the project before the people and got the momentum building to make a response to the growing burden was John Bullock, the director of our Royal Ambassador program.

He proposed a Royal Ambassador project for the World Hunger Fund drive, which was to start soon. John was a great organizer and generator of enthusiasm! He put together a public relations piece, designed and produced an embroidered shoulder patch, and had thousands of Royal Ambassador Boys raising funds in their local churches for North Korea all across Texas!

The R.A. chapters would send their funds and John Bullock would send every boy in the chapter a patch. This helped alert and inform Baptists across Texas about the hunger and suffering of the people of North Korea. The burden was spreading to other hearts.

The DPRK sent a request for help on two more farms. The Agricultural Fellowship responded by sending a farmer from Lubbock, Texas, Powell Adams. Powell farms hundreds of acres of wheat, cotton, corn, etc. He is an outstanding manager, agricultural economist, businessman, and creative thinker-problem solver! He was well versed in soil chemistry and soil amendments. Powell can put on a suit and tie and be chairman of the board, or he could fire up his blacksmith's forge and hammer out a plow blade. He also does a lot of humanitarian aid projects in Lubbock.

Powell continued the work Dewayne started and did a lot to enhance the reputation of Baptists in North Korea! As a matter of fact his ministry there has covered fourteen years, so far, and he has worked with farmhands, agricultural managers, government officials, cabinet level ministers, and even their leader, Kim Jong Il.

The DPRK sent another request for agricultural assistance. It came through the Korean men's group with a request for an agricultural specialist. And, that they accompany him to one of their large collective farms. This presented a problem. We had discovered that there were several groups in the government which were in competition for bringing in foreign aid. We also discovered that there were divisions in their External Affairs Ministry that worked with the various aid groups. For instance, as Anglo-Americans we were assigned to the Flood Damage Rehabilitation Committee (FDRC), but the Korean-Americans were assigned to the Expatriate Committee.

This meant anyone we sent with the Korean group could not be sent later with an American group, because the two committees were in competition.

I could not use anyone I had sent before.

I prayed constantly for an answer...and the phone rang.

The caller was a pastor with the First Baptist Church of Plains, Texas, Bill Wright. He asked what his church could do to be more involved in the Korean project. He said he was in a farming community and pastored a church full of farmers. I said, "Brother Bill, I am not sure what you can do, but, right now I have a problem with the project. I need someone with farm experience who can inspect and evaluate a huge collective farm. He would need to be able to evaluate their equipment and estimate its capability. Also, there is a need to evaluate the arable land and determine what chemicals, fertilizers, or soil amendments would be necessary to enhance their crop yield. We need to know what labor force they have and their general condition." I paused to get my breath and he interrupted with...

"I have just the man for the job."

Surprised by his sudden reply, I asked, "Huh? What did you say?"

Why was I surprised? I had asked God for help and He did it! Sometime we pray and wonder if God is really listening, and God responds with, "I thought you would never ask!"

Brother Bill repeated and continued, "I have just the man for the job! He is Jered Sellers. A few days ago he came to me for counseling because he wanted to be involved in ministry. He was asking for ways he could serve God with his life. I told him I would call Texas Baptist Men and ask about ministry opportunities for laymen and get some information on the Korean project as well."

"What does he do for a living, farm?" I asked.

"No, he owns Sellers Agricultural Chemical Company, Sellers Agricultural Equipment Company, Sellers Electrical Supply Company, and fifty percent of an internet provider company," He replied.

When God does something that spooky, I am always amazed!

Jered flew to Dallas in his personal aircraft for an interview. We spent hours together in the airport lounge explaining the project history, the problems we faced with the committees, etc. I began to tell him what I wanted know about this enormous collective farm. He was making detailed notes. The Holy Spirit finally got my attention by informing me that the reason Jered was here was because he knew more about what I needed to know than I did. I stopped talking, paused, and said, "Jered, inspect this farm as if you were going to buy it."

"Oh, okay! Now I know what you want!"

A lot of time was wasted because I had been "preaching to the choir"! It was another lesson in trusting the people whom God sends in answer to your prayer.

At the end of his work in the DPRK, he gave me an outstanding report! He listed the equipment, its condition, fuel availability, the crops they produced and the rate of production per hectare. He gave age groupings of the 2500 inhabitants, how many children were in each grade at school, and their general health. He even listed the number of oxen, ox carts, and how many ducks they had!

During this same time, money was coming in from the world hunger projects and I was working on a plan similar to the one we used in feeding Russians when the Iron Curtain came down. These were food boxes with staple foods and cooking oil. However, Powell Adams called and informed me that he was on the board of a company called The Breedlove Dehydrator. The company was willing to produce a dehydrated soup mix for us. The company

was a part of the Texas Food Bank system. It distributed food to food banks for low income families.

God was at work!

God was at work in a BIG way!

The Korean men were very pleased with this idea because soup is a staple in Korean cooking and would be easy to prepare in the typical Korean kitchen. Farmers brought their surplus produce as a donation to the food banks. Breedlove developed a mixture of vegetables and protein, seasoned and dehydrated it. The only cost to us was the dehydration and packaging costs.

The Agricultural and Korean Fellowships met at the plant in Lubbock to sample and load the first shipping container for North Korea. It was a twenty foot steel shipping container which would hold 500,000 meals, and the total cost for the food, the container, and the shipping was \$18,000. Each meal would only cost 3.6 cents each.

God was at work in a REALLY BIG way!

We lived in constant prayer for this project! God had sent \$18,000 for a January shipment.

We prayed without ceasing! God sent \$18,000 for a February shipment.

Fervent prayer continued! God sent \$18,000 for a March shipment...and an April shipment...and a May shipment!

Then, the funds ceased coming. I cried out to God for help. My cry was desperate because my heart was so burdened! The phone rang. My secretary told me the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention was holding for me.

They quizzed me about my food shipments, my funding, and my shipping process. After a long discussion, they asked for my help in sending more food to the DPRK.

I was ecstatic! They wanted to start sending a forty-foot shipping container every month...starting in June!

The larger container would hold 1,200,000 meals and would cost \$36,000 to pack and ship. The cost per meal dropped to 3.0 cents! Just when I thought we had exhausted our resources, He doubled them! Isn't that just like Him? Sometime He is really spooky!

Lesson learned...but He was not through yet!

I received a call from Dr Kenneth Dupuy in Longview, Texas. The same man who helped in the Peruvian cholera epidemic. He asked what we were doing for North Korea. I proudly gave him a detailed report!

His reply, "Dr. John that is not even a drop in the bucket, they need some real help! I mean something BIG! I just heard that our government was giving money to the World Food Program (WFP) of the United Nations for North Korea. That group does not hire Americans as monitors and this gift from our country needs to have American faces on the deliverers. Can you go to Washington, D.C. with me next week?"

I had scribbled a note to my secretary, Francis Jenkins, as he spoke. She nodded that the week was clear and signaled that she already had gotten approval from Bob Dixon. She was the miracle worker that stood by my side when I first came to the TBM staff in 1981. She was truly God's gift to me and the ministry of TBM!

I told Ken that I was available and he proceeded to tell me where we would stay, how to dress, what car rental to use, etc. He was worked up and ready!

Little did I know what I was about to experience and what lessons I would learn...but that is another story and you will find it in the next chapter.

Chapter 20

North Korea: Groundwork

Dr. Kenneth Dupuy is one of the most fascinating people I have ever met! I mentioned him in a previous chapter. As I have said, he was Deputy Director of the Budget under President Richard Nixon. In 1973, he was assigned to manage the energy crisis. He organized and developed the Energy Department, built their building, and managed the entire staff. Ken has a Ph.D. in geology and was a Texas oil producer and petroleum business man.

He became a believer in Jesus Christ and trusted Him for forgiveness and salvation while he was in Washington. When he returned to Texas, he was eager to know everything he could about God, the Bible, and theology. He was so hungry for knowledge that he enrolled in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Eventually, he earned a Ph.D. in theology.

We spent four days in Washington. At first it was, “You are who and you want what?”, but every day he picked up backing for the project. A letter from this Senator’s aid, signed by the Senator, to another Senator’s aid, who wrote a letter of recommendation, signed by the Senator; to another Senator ...I was astounded! By the fourth day, the Secretary of State had the director of USAID, eight of his staff, and four staff members from The World Food Program (WFP) of the United Nations in a conference with us.

We had been grilled, interrogated, and approved by the Foreign Relations Committee, the National Security Council, and many others. My mind was still trying to make sense and gain some understanding of what all had happened, as Ken stated our case and won their approval for our project.

While Ken worked the lines of politics, I was working the prayer line. I thought it rather strange as we dealt with one person after another who was wrapped in arrogance, because they were in a position of power in Washington. Yet all I had to do was bow my head in prayer in order to be in the throne room of the Almighty Sovereign God of the universe, the God that laughs at the plans of the nations who oppose Him.

Ken had taken time to get our original Amigos Internacionales organization certified as a vendor for USAID. When the Secretary of State approved his plan, she said, “This is a very ambitious program. Form a consortium of Amigos and four other groups to take part in this.”

Catholic Relief Services (CRS), World Vision (WVI), Mercy Corps (MCI), and CARE were the four others selected. Since Amigos had no staff, except our volunteers. Ken suggested CARE be the financial manager and Catholic Relief Services be the program Manager. The staff which would do the monitoring of the food distribution in the field would come from World Vision, Mercy Corps, and Amigos Internacionales.

I am hesitant to use the people’s individual names in this chapter because they may still be involved in international humanitarian aid projects. And their involvement with the DPRK could jeopardize their lives and/or work.

Ken was able to get a grant large enough to purchase, transport and monitor the distribution of 60,000 metric tons of corn. A metric ton is 2,200 lbs. It took four ships to deliver the corn to the DPRK.

I asked Ken how he got such a large grant and he said, "I asked for it. The trouble with most groups is they do not ask for a large enough grant. The USAID people had rather monitor one grant for five million dollars than five grants for one million dollars. Each grant requires the same amount of work."

"When you get home, you need to ask Bob Dixon for a three months leave of absence because I told them you would be the monitor from Amigos." He said casually.

"You did what? I need to do what?" I stammered!

It was at that moment I realized, up until now; I had been in the sending mode in all of the DPRK projects. My attitude had been, "Here am I, Lord. Send my brother!" It was my time to go.

I told my wife what was happening. She smiled and said, "I knew this was coming. God has been getting me ready for it. I will miss you for those three months, but we must be obedient to Him."

Bob Dixon said, "Johnny, I really feel this is the Lord's will. We will support you in prayer while you are away."

Don Gibson, John Bullock, Francis Jenkins, and the other office staff promised to cover my work and duties while I was gone. The schedule called for a mid-September departure and to return by Thanksgiving, basically three months.

A call for prayer went out to all of our friends, family, church members, TBM members, and everybody else we could think of to join our prayer chain.

The Red River Baptist Association invited me to speak at their annual meeting. After I spoke, the Director of Missions, Warren Hart asked the group to pray for me and the North Korean project. Warren had been with me in Iran during Desert Storm and the Kurdish aid project. He asked the people to pray for me and, suddenly, entire church groups began to volunteer to take a week for a 24 hour per day prayer chain. In a few moments every week was taken and I was secure under a blanket of prayer.

After I returned from the DPRK, I met with the Red River Baptist Association again and went through my journal. I asked each church what week they prayed, I went to that week in my journal, and reported what God had done in response to their prayer. It was a tremendous praise meeting!

The preparation necessary for such a trip is mind boggling! I was going to a closed socialist country where I might not be able to buy anything. I will need office supplies, computer, repair kit and tools, vitamins, medication for possible medical and dental problems, electrical test equipment, surge protector, power strips, video and still cameras, sewing and fabric repair kit, water purifier, Bible and reference books, spice kit, peanut butter, Tabasco Sauce, drafting kit, GPS, transistor radio, etc., etc. My son gave me a kit for my blood pressure and temperature. He said, "Dad, you are going to be under constant surveillance, and emotional stress, so check your blood pressure frequently." That boy was a prophet!

Some of the things I felt led to take I had no idea that I would ever use. However, I eventually used everything I packed!

The departure day arrived. My itinerary called for an overnight stay in Seoul, South Korea, fly to Beijing, China, meet the team and fly to Pyongyang, North Korea. Well that was the intended plan, but God had another!

Chapter 21

North Korea: Boots on the Ground

I had not been to bed in two days because of the need to have all of my projects, meetings, and other responsibilities covered by substitute leadership. Trying to transfer leadership to others will sometime require more time in training the new people than it would take to do it yourself.

I was a zombie by the time I reached the airport. I dragged myself, my carry on catalog case, two large duffle bags, and a huge suitcase to the ticket counter. I produced my passport and ticket for the agent and waited while she checked the computer. She said, "I will need to rewrite your ticket because you have been upgraded to first class." I was dumbfounded! I had never flown first class in my entire life!

"Are you sure?" I queried.

She said, "Yes, sir. There is a note here from the corporate office that all portions of your flight, which are on American Airlines, are to be in first class."

I fell into the enormous first class seat, hooked my seat belt and slept for hours. God provided a tremendous unexpected blessing!

I called my wife from Seoul and she explained that a member of our church, Fielder Road Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, was a pediatrician with a heart for mission work. Dr. Robert Mann had been asked to pray for me. He had been one of the Baptist doctors in Iraq when I was in Iran the first time. He called an executive of American Airlines whose children were his patients, explained my task, and got the upgrade for me. God is so good!

My overnight stay in Seoul, Korea was stretched into six days because the DPRK had not issued visas for our group. I told the missionary that my baggage was checked through to Beijing. She stopped, had a short prayer, and took me to the ticket counter and explained my problem to the agent. He rolled his eyes and said, "How am I going to find his three bags in the mountain of luggage in the Beijing baggage bay? I do not know what they look like!"

She said, "Young man, we have had prayer. Go look." The agent called the baggage manager, gave him my claim numbers, and waited for a few minutes. Suddenly, his eyes widened, and he turned to us and said, "His three bags are the only ones in the Beijing baggage bay!"

The missionary asked, "Are you a Christian?" He replied, "YES, I am." She told him, "Sir, you have just witnessed an answered prayer!"

The lesson I learned with the Kurdish-Iranian mission was immediately applied. God is not surprised by my delays, He is sovereign, and He knows the future. Time to pray, purify my heart, and double check my preparation.

There were lessons to be learned that could only be learned by being immersed in the Korean culture. An American missionary to South Korea and a Korean-American missionary to South Korea took me under their wings. They were an endless source of information on every aspect of being an American in the Korean culture.

My computer hard drive crashed and one of the local church members repaired it. I had an opportunity to check and double check all of my equipment and supplies. Everything I needed was available in Seoul; even soul support!

The missionaries took me to church on Sunday. There were several services to minister to the huge congregation. When I sat down, I looked up at the podium, and beside the pastor was seated Dr. Kim! He was the speaker at the Dallas church who got this entire ministry started. I had been trying to reach him for three weeks. He was the speaker for the service. He spotted me and during the message, he told of my mission. He explained my mission and said, "He will be in North Korea for three months and I do not know if he will be able to survive. We must pray for him now. He will be helping our people and our relatives in the north. He will be helping them when we cannot! Pray for him!" And they did!

To say that everybody prayed out loud at once would be an understatement of what happened. They cried out to God with tears and emotion in such a powerful way I am convinced they shook the altar in Heaven.

Two wonderful things occurred at the end of the prayer time. First, a young man came to me and clung to my arm, saying, "I have no money to give you to help my people, but I will give you my pledge and my heart that I will cling to the altar of prayer for you every day you are there!" The second thing was an opportunity to spend hours being briefed by Dr. Kim on living in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Dr. Kim is the president of Yanbian University for Science and Technology in China, I referred to him in a previous chapter. It is a school operated and staffed by Christian volunteers. It has a very high academic rating and seventy-three percent of the graduates become Christians before they graduate.

Dr. Kim comes to Seoul once a year to testify about his work in the DPRK (North Korea) and China. God put me in Seoul for that one day! He knew how badly I needed Dr. Kim's wisdom and counsel!

Trust the Lord in all circumstances and He will do you good (That is a La Noue free translation of Psalm 37:3).

We spent the rest of the day in isolation as he shared with me what life was like in the DPRK, how to conduct myself without offending others, to always show respect for the Dear Leader, Kim Jong Il, and his deceased father, Kim Il Sung. Always shake hands with your right hand and use your left hand to cradle your right wrist as you extend your right hand. Always accompany this with a slight bow from the waist. He also said there were no purifying chemicals available for the municipal water supplies. Never take a picture without permission. He reminded me that the DPRK was still at war with the US technically. He explained the impossibility of trying to monitor the distribution of the corn, when we would probably not be permitted to travel outside of a fifteen kilometer radius around Pyongyang. This perimeter was the only place most foreigners were permitted to travel.

Dr. Kim was a library of information, some I have shared here and some I cannot. After our meeting, he disappeared again.

That night my missionary guide came to my room and told me I would need to pack, because my flight would leave early the next morning. That meant I would be up most of the night and I was already very tired. In my fatigue, Satan stepped in with a flash of anger.

I suddenly felt out of control. I was one of the leaders. Why wasn't I told earlier? Who set this up? Who is calling the plays in this game? They did not know Dr. Dupuy, or so I thought. I discovered later that he had researched everyone in my possible contact group between, and including, Dallas and Beijing. He contacted them, explained the mission, my training needs, and he was the one monitoring the diplomatic situation. He was managing my

care, training, and travel from his home in Longview, Texas. God had given me a guardian angel who was a native Texan!

When I arrived in Beijing, I was very concerned about getting all my equipment and electronics through customs and about getting to the hotel. I had made arrangements, originally, with a guide and translator, to meet me when my flight arrived five days earlier.

I dragged my bags to a group of six customs agents and said, "I want to ask about declaring my bags. Do any of you speak English?" They looked at me, grunted, and turned their backs to me. Great! I hustled my baggage passed them with a purposefully confused look on my face...and a smile in my heart!

As I walked out of the customs department door, I saw two smiling Chinese faces under a sign that read, "John Le Nou". Dr. Kim had called ahead, without my knowledge, and made arrangements. There were several more times he kept me out of trouble. I wonder if God made some Korean angels.

The team finally came together at the Holiday Inn, Lido in Beijing. For three days we shared our histories, got acquainted with our assignments, and feasted before going to the land of the famine.

I experienced a good bit of, "who are you, really?" They were from large, well funded, well connected humanitarian aid organizations. I had seen the USAID budget from the previous year. In it was an item where World Vision International had received at least \$100,000,000. My reply to their inquisition was that Amigos Internacionales was a group which operated beneath the radar of publicity and news stories. This was true, but not always intentional. News organizations have often seemed oblivious to the presence of faith based organizations in disaster response. Finally, my personal roll call of disaster response from 1967 to 1997 was sufficient to let them know this was not "My first rodeo."

One of them had been director of their group's entire African operation, one was the director of their group's Kyrgystan work, another was a leader in his group's Indonesian ministry, and the other was a financial officer in his group's international work. They were all being paid a salary by the consortium. I was the only volunteer worker in the consortium. The financial officer had a difficult time trying to understand why, but he did not know that a part of the presentation Amigos had made to the USAID was for our monitor to be a volunteer.

Every moment I was not with the team, I was in prayer. I was without my "life mate prayer mate". In the lonesome hours of the night God was teaching me to find comfort and companionship with Him. It was a hard lesson to learn. Being semi-conscious in the middle of the night, I would rollover in bed and drape my arm over...the empty space where she had been for 43 years. I would pop awake, remember where I was, remember where she was, and pray for her. Often I would remain awake for several hours and ease into the Father's warm, gracious embrace. I would stay in that circle of love, experiencing His fatherly presence, while my fears, apprehensions, burdens, and concerns were sorted out, checked out, and eliminated.

We had agreed to pray the same prayer for each other at the same time each day. We prayed the prayer as her day was ending and, a half a world away, as my day was beginning. We prayed a prayer called, "The Breast Plate of St. Francis". It was a great sensation of unity with my soulmate knowing that we were praying the same words for each other at the same time.

I tried to go to the DPRK Embassy to get my visa. I called a taxi; the hotel doorman explained where I wanted to go. The driver looked at my American face and drove straight to the South Korean Embassy. I tried to explain his error and he did not understand. I finally said, "Hotel Holiday Inn!"

At the hotel, I tried another interpreter to explain my destination to the driver. He nodded that he understood, and off we went to the South Korean Embassy again. I prayed for help. How could I get this driver to go to the North Korean Embassy? God gave me an answer. I pulled a note pad from my pocket and drew a DPRK flag. I pointed to it and motioned that this is where I want to go! The driver pointed to me and said, "American! No go." I shook my head, yes, and kept tapping the flag picture. He looked at me as if I had a death wish, but turned the taxi around and took me to the DPRK Embassy.

This was my first contact with officials from the DPRK and they were not accustomed to giving Americans visas to their country. No visa on this first contact. As I thought about it, I could imagine the communiqué between Pyongyang and Beijing. "An American came in for a visa, what do I do...but he is an American...are you sure? OK!"

The visa was ready the next day.

Our team checked in to the Beijing Airport, got tickets from the Koryo Airline agent (The North Korean Airline) and went to the departure gate to await our flight call. I closed my eyes, as if resting, to pray. I was talking to the Father about my teammates, our flight, our entry into the country, for passage through their customs system with all my gear and supplies, and thanking Him for this unbelievable opportunity to serve Him in the DPRK. When I opened my eyes, I saw Dr. Kim across the room!

I greeted him warmly and received a cordial but cool response. Something was up; I picked up on his cue. I responded to him in the same professional way. He knew we were under surveillance in the gate area. Being a Korean, he was working with a different part of the government and did not want to jeopardize his work or ours.

Our flight was called and as we boarded, I noticed there was no tread on the two nose gear tires. I wished I had seen some tread, then, I saw a glint of light from the side wall of one tire. "Oops," I thought I wish I had not seen the steel belt on that one!" It was an old, Russian Illushyn aircraft. I had tried to charter one like this when I was moving some equipment to Iran for the Kurdish-Iranian project in Desert Storm. However, the British would not let them land at their airports because they were untrustworthy and dangerous.

My thoughts, "God is sovereign. I am His slave. Let's git'er done!"

It was a smooth flight and one of the smoothest landings I have experienced on any airline. The flight crew was very professional and, I might say, gifted with superb skill. I was impressed.

Our crew deplaned in Pyongyang and for the first time I was standing on North Korean soil. It was an emotional experience for which I was unprepared.

The Korean War started in June of 1950. I was fifteen years old and working in an Alabama auto repair shop. I still had vivid memories of World War II, food rationing, tire and gasoline rationing, watching the newspaper headlines and front page maps to see who was winning, and all of the other things that war forces upon a Nation. I was going into my sophomore year in high school and would be draft age when I finished in 1953. The Korean War dominated my life for three years.

Now I was standing in their country, still considered an enemy, but I was here to give them aid. How strange it all seemed!

My custom in international airports, during the immigration, passport, and baggage inspection phase, is to study the agents and pray for God's guidance to the right one. It may be the one with a smile, or pleasant manner. Perhaps it is the one who is in a hurry and wants to get people through his line, and out the door. I studied them all until I was almost the last one to

enter the quay. The one I felt led to was a stern faced soldier who glared at me, an American, with a look that bordered on ferocity.

I uttered a silent prayer, "Lord, are you sure?"

I lined up my entire luggage on the conveyor belt with my carry on as the first one. I presented my customs declaration form; he jerked my carry on from the conveyor, opened it, looked at my declaration form and proceeded to go nuts! He yelled at me in Korean and made motions demanding my presence in his stall immediately!

God bless Dr. Kim! He stepped up and said, "Dr. La Noue, you are in trouble! May I help?"

"Yes, sir!" I replied!

The agent, a soldier, held up my computer and asked why I did not declare it on the form. I explained through Dr. Kim that the form did not list it in the electronics list. I noticed that as we talked, my other luggage was going down the conveyor belt and dropping in the approved luggage bin. I immediately assumed a deeply repentant countenance, with a bowed head, asking his forgiveness for my obviously stupid action, and launched into a lengthy apology. It became obvious that he was getting a lot of joy out of this encounter with an American. When my last bag hit the floor in the approved baggage area, I stopped talking, repacked my carryon bag and stepped into Pyongyang.

In the fuss over my computer, he missed the bags with all of the electronics and supplies which would have really sent him into orbit!

My boots were on the ground in North Korea!

Chapter 22

North Korea: The Work Begins

The people who met us at the airport were from the Flood Damage Rehabilitation Committee (FDRC). They were to be our hosts while we were in the DPRK. They were fluent in English, well versed in their country's history, and trained to lecture us daily on the virtues of their country's government and philosophy. They were so committed to their work, yet they were pleasant, and they seemed eager to be with us.

The Koryo Hotel was to be our residence for the duration. We went to our assigned rooms, which were singles. Entering the doorway, there was a small foyer, to the right was the bathroom, straight ahead was a small two chair sitting room where you could look down on the street, and to the left, was the bedroom, with two single beds. On the right of the foyer was an enormous wall mounted mirror.

It was possible to see the mirror from every space in the suite.

I was able to see in the next suite when the maids came to service it. It was exactly opposite of my room. The huge mirror was mounted on the left wall of that foyer. I also noticed the walls between the two suites were about three feet apart and there was a door in the wall of the hallway between the two rooms. I was just being alert and cautious as I usually am when overseas, not necessarily suspicious. But, it was interesting.

Our team met with an FDRC official to begin negotiating the methods and detail of our monitoring work. Our expectations were to verify the amount of corn delivered from each ship, confirm the bagging operation, go to the delivery sites, confirm the amount of corn expected, and confirm the amount actually delivered for distribution. This would require transportation and a host for each monitor. The sites to receive corn and the amount to be delivered would be decided by our team negotiator and the FDRC representative.

The negotiations began with our presentation of monitoring requirements. Their negotiator ignored most of what we said and told us how it would be. He also informed us that any travel would be done as a group in one vehicle.

After hours of negotiation, their man said, "Look at this from our situation, we are at war with your country. You are behind enemy lines. Do you expect us to let you travel over our country? We are an honest people. How do you think our officials feel about Americans double checking their reports? You must realize that our people are mad at America because their embargos against us have caused so many of our problems!"

Stalemate!

I excused myself from the group and retired to my room...to pray. I prayed God would show us a way to do our job, that He would soften the negotiator's heart, show us a way to satisfy his superiors and still get the job done. I prayed for an opening through which we could go to get our job done.

Everyone was in the coffee shop when I returned. They had made no progress. The Father prompted me to ask the FDRC official a question totally unrelated to the negotiations, "What is your major problem beside the food shortage?"

He jerked his head up, looked at me in surprise, and blurted out, "The typhoon which hit our west coast two days ago. It destroyed much of our western dike system that protected us from the sea. Salt water has damaged large fields of wheat and rice!"

To the surprise of my teammates, I replied, "I have almost forty years of experience with natural disasters, including hurricanes, typhoons, and earthquakes. How are you going to repair those dikes?"

He said, "We have sent 40,000 to 60,000 mobilizees to each of the large breaches."

"How are they going to live there?" I asked.

"They must make their own shelter." He replied.

"How do you plan to feed them?" I queried.

He dropped his gaze, staring at the table top, he said, "I do not know. That is my major problem."

I asked him if he would let us help him by sending food to the dike repair crews. He snapped his head up and asked, "Would you help us?"

I replied, "Of course, that is why we are here! We could set up a food for work program using your measures and feed your workers."

He practically danced with happiness and relief as he left.

I looked up and quietly prayed, "Thank you, Lord! You solved both groups problem with a question I would never have thought to ask!"

Eventually, I was able to travel over most of the west coast checking work done and food distributed. I tried to share my faith with one of my hosts on a long road trip. He laughed at me and said he did not believe in God because it was irrational. I continued to talk about my religion, but he was well trained in countering every attempt I made. His training locked his mind against anything I tried to say.

I prayed, "Father, what can I do to break this barrier?"

He spoke in my mind, "Just be quiet. I will take care of it. Trust me."

I did as I was told...and He really did what He said He would do!

I traveled to Sinuiju, one of the northern most cities on the west coast. It is across the River Amnok, our maps call it the Yalu River, from Dandong, China. Standing on a hilltop, I could see vast fields of wheat, corn, and rice. The grain heads and cobs had not filled out with grain yet, but the plants were turning brown...dead because of the tidal surge of salt water.

This broke my heart! The hunger was already at a lethal level. The corn we were bringing was to help them live until their harvest time, and now the harvest would not be coming. The dike system was severely damaged! Breaks from several hundred meters to one kilometer wide were evident. Some of the cuts had as many as 40,000 to 60,000 people camped out in the surrounding fields. Our corn began to arrive in 110 pound sacks. The sacks were white, with red, white, and blue stripes. USA was stamped in large letters. It was clearly evident who sent the corn.

Walking along the dikes and being among the mobilizees was a wonderful experience! Many would stop their work, or come out of their rice straw thatched shelters grab my hand and thank me for the food with broad smiles on their faces. I was humbled by the sacrifice they were making just to be there, compared to the hotel or guest house where I would be sleeping.

It is very difficult to give you a mental image of the reconstruction scene on a dike. The dikes were twenty or thirty meters wide at the bottom, twelve meters wide at the top, and ten to fifteen meters tall. When I calculated the amount of material it would take to rebuild one meter of the smaller dike, I was astonished! It required 160 cubic meters, or 208 cubic yards to build 39 inches of the smallest dike. It would take almost 35 loads of mud in a six cubic yard dump truck to build 39 inches of dike. They were facing 100 to 1,000 meter cuts in the dikes. There were many miles of dikes to be repaired before the land could be desalinated and planted again.

All of their earth moving equipment had been covered with salt water and was ruined. They were using shovels to load mud from the sea floor at low tide on to back pack racks. A person with a load of mud would climb the dike; dump the mud into the dike bed, where people were mixing it with rice straw, using their bare feet. It was like the Biblical description of the Hebrews in Egypt making bricks with mud and straw. By American standards, I was looking at an impossible solution to an unbelievable task.

They were singing as they worked. They completed the project. I was deeply impressed by the Korean people.

Over several weeks, I traveled down the west coast from town to town, and county to county surveying many thousands of hectares (2.471 acres in one hectare) of ruined crops. Actually, the World Food Program of the U.N. estimated their loss to be 20% of their harvest. I became more convinced than ever that I was on a life saving mission.

My inconveniences in living conditions, and travel for hours bouncing over broken roads, my heartbreaking separation from my family, the submersion in a foreign culture and language, the constant surveillance and control I was under, the intense concentration I had to have on what I saw, heard, and said...suddenly, became of no concern!

I was in the middle of God's will and joining Him in His work!

This is usually when He gives me the battle plan for conquering one challenge at a time. I can smell the aroma of the, yet, unrealized, victory. He does not want me to become an expert at conquering challenges. He wants me to walk on my knees in prayer, so He can instruct me in how to conquer the challenge before me. Victory is not my goal; that is for Him. My goal is obedience! He alone must receive the glory.

When a volunteer, Cesellie Vance, typed my hand written journal it was 128 pages long. Every entry was written as a love letter to my wife.

She is a master of detail and planning and has her Ph.D. in education administration. So, I wrote in detail to answer the questions I knew she would ask if we were together. When you have been together as long as we have, you can pretty well think the other's thoughts in a situation.

Some day, I would like to publish the journal as "Love Letters from North Korea"...but she would blush!

Chapter 23

North Korea: Vignettes from the North Korean Journal Walking in the Valley with a Mountain Top Attitude

Introduction:

This was written to my wife, Dr. Kaywin La Noue, “Dr. L.” during an extended stay in North Korea, a closed country especially to Americans. God did a wonderful work for me and in me in North Korea and I just want to share God’s answered prayers.

It is not possible to include all of the journal information in this book, so I will try to give you the setting in which the following journal excerpts occurred. The previous chapters have described some events and I have shared some of the lessons learned as a result of walking with God through the test

For many years, I taught mountaineering. Walking with God has had many similarities. Often you would face a testy situation in the mountains and when it was over, we would study the event, our method of meeting the test, and, then learn the lesson. In this section, I must let you walk with me through the times of stress, opposition, loneliness, frustration, various kinds of trouble, depression, and doubt. I will try to be as transparent as possible in order for you to see how God met every need through His presence as the Holy Spirit, the messages sent through His Holy Word, and sometime through the communication of His silence.

Try to picture the situation in your imagination. As I said earlier, we normally had worked beneath the radar of publicity because when working with leaders and bureaucrats, things go smoother if they get the credit for what is accomplished. I was less than low man on the totem pole in the consortium because no one had ever heard of Amigos Internacionales, Inc.

We were trying to monitor the distribution of corn in a country that is technically still at war with the US. We were in a real sense behind enemy lines, yet we needed to travel around the country to do our job. This meant that we had to be under constant surveillance and control. We had a guide with us at all times who spoke English, but they would be anxious at times because we were traveling in areas where no American had been for 50 years. The military was watching our groups very carefully to be sure we were not involved in espionage. This made everyone anxious. While all of this was in progress, Satan was active at home.

The daily affirmation of my call to the DPRK was necessary to quiet the turmoil in my life, externally, and in my soul, internally. Only through prayer and feasting daily on the Scripture could I maintain the stability to do my job and let God be seen in me.

My constant companion was a pocket size copy of the Living New Testament with Psalms. Most of the quotes from Scripture used in these vignettes are taken from this book. Remember, these excerpts from my journal were written to my wife, please excuse any romance that surfaces.

Our daily activities normally followed this pattern: grinding out the ship’s unloading process, the bagging process, the distribution plan development, the transportation methods, and the development of the monitoring plan was mentally, emotionally and spiritually draining. I kept praying for some way to expedite the process.

Vignette 1:

We were having visa problems. Our visas needed to be extended to mid-November, but were only good until October 7. After negotiating until 9:00 PM, the only answer we could get, “We agree to study the problem. We will address your visa problems later. There is plenty of time.”

We have been here 27 days and this is the second or third time we have been through visa negotiations. We need to stay until November 15. My heart goes out to the DPRK negotiating team and our guides. We have been here three weeks longer than Americans are normally permitted to stay. Our guides, who are with us constantly day and night, are stressed. They have not been home to their families and have been translating for 14 to 16 hours every day.

The negotiators are under pressure from their supervisors to send the Americans home, and they are under pressure from us to let us stay until the last of the four ships has arrived, been unloaded, and the corn distributed.

The uncertainty and constant pressure reminds me, darling, of the first day of a disaster . . . everyday. We have been here 27 days, but this is not like a disaster 27 days later. It is like the first day of a disaster 27 times. It requires God given patience and strength

The lessons I was learning in this place, broken by natural disasters, came in a constant flowing stream. The explanations may seem tedious at times, but the lessons that were surfacing under stress, might not have been learned or even noticed in easier times. Learning to trust the sovereignty of God was a continuing lesson. Learning to walk with Him in faith and not by sight was another continuing lesson. I was learning to determine what parts of the project were my duties and that the rest were His. I was learning to trust Him and His plan. He only gave me enough light for my uplifted foot, not enough to see the whole project’s path.

Vignette 2:

A surprise awaited me on one of my Sunday church attendances. It was a day of blessing!

I went to church at Bongsu; our car came up behind a three or four car caravan weaving its way up the broken concrete street that leads through a residential high rise area next to the river. The last car license had a red star and three digits of numbers. I had never seen one like it—must be biggies!

At the church-TV, cameras, boom mikes, a crowd out front, church attendees (who knows who is a member and who is required to be there?) in a double line applauding as Mrs. Ruth Graham, elderly, stately, graceful beauty gets out of one of the cars helped by Gigi Graham’s husband.

In church, I sit behind Gigi and beside the director of the Dr. Eugene Bell Foundation (named after Mrs. Graham’s father), Stephen Litton. Stephen is our interpreter as he also interprets for Gigi. John 3:16 was the pastor’s text. “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (Living Bible)

After the message, Mrs. Graham was asked to bring greetings. She was helped slowly up the four steps, and at the pulpit she flashed a radiant smile.

I looked at her and thought of you—all the days of being alone with the family responsibility, all of the waiting for phone calls, hurried family times while others clamored for my attention, of all the sacrifices you made for a husband’s ministry, and I wept and wept, and

still I am choked up when I think of it, even as I write! I love you, Darling! There is no one on earth who could do what you do, as you do it, and still maintain the joy in Lord that you manifest-I know it is hard!

Mrs. Graham began to speak “This is my first time in 60 years to be in Pyongyang. When I was a 13 year old girl here, I was a student at the school for foreigners. I came to understand that Jesus had died to save sinners, but I felt that I was not included in His plan. I told my sister about my sadness and what I thought. She told me to read John 3:16 and put my name in where it said ‘world’, to read Isaiah 53:5-6 and put my name in it. I did, and then I understood. I prayed then I was cleansed and came to faith in Christ, the same faith that you can have as well. Today, there are many of you who need to take this step. The door is open for you. I will probably never see many of you again, but, if I don’t see you here, I hope to see you there (as she pointed upward). Thank you!” And she was helped back to her seat.

Devastatingly simple, powerful and done with an anointing of the Spirit that made me weep then and weep now as I write. Sixty years of preparation of a 9 sentence message that had a clear evangelistic message and delivered with power in a place where that message has been silenced or kept underground for so long. Wow! Yep, it was a good day at Bongsu Baptist Church-well I made it a Baptist Church for the day.

Vignette 3:

When one of the four ships needed to transport our corn arrived, it was a real lift for my spirit. It was like visiting an American colony with familiar food, faces, and fellowship. My comfort food was peanut butter and crackers. I had used it all up and had been praying to find a jar somewhere. God is interested in our little stuff as well as the big stuff. I made my needs known to the cook and he gave me a jar of Skippy creamy peanut butter. I have been sticking my nose in my empty peanut butter jar as I eat my bread. Thinking if I smelled it, my nose would tell my tongue “there is some on that bread, now taste it!” This is called either psychosomatic peanut butter or virtual reality peanut butter. I was thrilled when my virtual reality treat became actually.

I climbed down to the pilot boat to go ashore thinking, “I wish I had some crackers to go with this peanut butter.” The Lord must have heard my unintentional prayer because I heard a whistle, looked up at the deck rail, and there stood the steward holding a box of Ritz Crackers. He tossed them down to me, but the rocking of the pilot boat ruined his aim. They smacked down flat on the top of the cabin.

I opened the box that night, poured out some crumbs of my smacked crackers, dipped a small ball of peanut butter, and rolled it around in the crumbs. I thanked God for my good fortune, answered prayer (both intentional and unintentional), and my peanut butter ball delight!

Vignettes 4:

Working on the Northeast coast has its difficulties, especially with communication. We had worked out an unloading and distribution plan for the Port of Chongjin and the ship “Overseas Harriet.”

When I arrived at the Port today, after two day train ride, the corn was being unloaded from the ship, bagged, loaded on everything with wheels and shipped out. They had not received any notice of our distribution plan, so, without any authority, they were hauling it away.

I called Pyongyang and explained the problem. They informed me that a new plan had been developed and only 8,000 metric tonnes were to be unloaded at Chongjin. This was a big problem! The ship had already “popped the hatches” (opened the grain storage bins, or holds) for the unloading of the original 14,000 metric tonnes. These holds were filled with corn in New Orleans, the hatch covers were hermetically sealed and dehumidified. If moisture got into the holds with the corn, it would mildew or rot and need to be dumped overboard as useless.

To change the unloading orders now meant to do a whole lot of laborious, tedious, work intensive things to balance the ship fore and aft, stabilize the cargo, which is corn—it acts like water in rough seas and can shift causing a ship to capsize. This necessitated initiating a very complicated maneuver requiring running a computer program full of calculations—I am getting an education “I gaurontee”. So I motored out to the ship with a prayer for a merciful, sympathetic, Christian Captain.

The ship was securely anchored by four anchors (the ship had too deep a draft to get to the dock), each anchor was evenly spaced, rock solid, no movement, looked like a drawing board picture—I thought “Man, this looks like a German captain anchored this with precision. If he is a German captain, he is probably an atheist. I am in for a hard time!”

I went on board and met the Captain, Hubert Von Rettberg. Born in Gdansk, Germany—then Poland took it—then the Russians took it—then he escaped to Kaiser-Slautern, Germany. Then he immigrated to France and to the U.S. He owns property in Port Arthur, Texas, has a Texas driver’s license and a “Don’t Mess with Texas” bumper sticker on his cabin door. He was a rugged, stocky, 62 year old barnacle.

I told him of the problem of 8,000 versus 14,000 metric tonnes. He scowled and grunted, “I vill do vat effer is necessary to discharge dis corn, but I vill not compromise the safety of dis ship nor dis crew—dis is complicated, let me consider it.”

He and his first mate went to his quarters and 45 minutes later I ventured up there. I knocked, asked for permission to enter his quarters. He looked a little surprised. “Ya! Come in—I think if we discharge 10, 600 metric tones, we can move safely and enter the next port where there is 8 ½ meters of water.” I thanked him, and he said, “Come sit I vant to talk to you.” I did and I apologized for the problem (which was not my doing, but the FDRC’s). He told me it was OK and said, “Let me tell you how I operate as a man, a captain, and this ship.” He reached for a framed statement—it read “Thoughts and Conclusions by Captain H. Von Rettberg”.

“Life without accepting the existence of God is like the mist of a mirage lacking reality and purpose.

I believe in Jesus Christ and the ‘Holy Trinity’. All my decisions concerning a vessel under my command and the crew thereof are based on this belief. As for myself, I am only human and should I fail ‘your’ expectations, don’t blame God for my inadequacies. Every day, on which we cannot do something positive, and it may only be a word of praise or encouragement to another person, is a day lost in our lives.

To be wise is having the ability to listen ‘carefully enough’ to hear God’s advice.

You are truly wise when you cease trying to understand our Creator, or to reason with Him, conceding humbly not to comprehend ‘God and His dimensions’.

Defamation is a weak person’s mode of acknowledging and paying tribute to ‘feared competition.’ Greed generates gullibility.

I am strong with endless resources through a firm belief and trust in God, an untiring willingness to work, and a fierce loyalty to my superiors. At my enemies, I smile with

amusement. How entertaining are their impotent rages, as their predictable behavior makes them vulnerable! Don't they know that 'Hatred only hurts the Hater'?

When you are impressed by a position you are holding, you are not providing the substance to fill it. There is no substitute for character.

A person's disposition and outlook on life is a matter of choice. When looking for beauty, you will always find it, although the 'negatives' may ever be present and sometimes overwhelmingly so.

End of physical life or death could mean 'ultimate liberation for an all fulfilling communion with God' or reunification with the 'only True Life'.

When you are content and sure of yourself, your knowledge and abilities, you will find no need to impress others.

Greed and lack of ability to compete are the roots of most crimes."

Captain Hubert Von Rettberg

Babe, when I read that I was blown away. This crusty old sea dog is a sea going David—A rough cut old sailor with a heart for God and a man after God's own heart. For three plus hours I listened to stories of guidance, divine intervention, walking with God on the bridge of the ship, of going against US Navy orders to change course to avoid a typhoon—to miss the typhoon entirely and the Navy's orders would have put him in the middle of where it moved.

The Naval officer, the storm center forecaster, confronted him ashore and said, "How did you do it? I have all the radar, hurricane spotter planes, reports and weather maps--you are at sea with none of this! Yet you changed your course two days before I could have predicted where to go to avoid the storm. How did you do it?"

The Captain replied, "I pray each morning and each night for God to determine my course. When the orders came, I left the bridge, went to my sleeping quarters and prayed. "God, what would you have me do? This is beyond me. Then I gave God control of my mind and He told me where to go."

When the weatherman retired from the service he became a pastor.

I had to leave at 2 p.m., as he was telling me about the cross on the bulkhead on the bridge, "When people ask about my success, I point to the cross and tell them, it is not me, I owe it all to Him!"

I had prayer with him before I left and he wept, we wept. As I left he gave me a copy of Luther's morning and evening prayers (a Catholic praying a Lutheran prayer) and I shared with him a copy of St. Patrick's prayer (a Baptist praying a Catholic prayer)—Oh, Lord, what is this world coming to?"—To YOU I pray!

Other than that, Sugar, it was just a normal day on the water front in the People's Democratic Republic of Korea—Yeah, uh-huh, you betcha! What a God we serve!!!

And I had 2 big cups of coffee with milk (first milk in 2 months) and 2 doughnuts! And a bowl of Chicken Gumbo and a ½ baked Chicken for lunch w/biscuits and honey—Oh, Lord, what a wonderful Day!!! Burp! (That's my tummy saying—"Amen!").

"Dear Lord, please give us until November 4th—21 days more than they expect—3 "7's"—Glorify yourself in this as in Psalms 2!", I prayed..

I just finished supper—only a bottle of spring water—trying to apologize to my body for the abuse it took at lunch today. Now to the Word!

Vignette 5:

One of the great things about being a Christian is the instantaneous connection you make when you meet a stranger who is a believer. They are no longer strangers but brothers in Christ. These events on the "Motor Vessel Overseas Harriet" illustrate this fact.

I "accidentally" was on board the ship when lunch was served—that took a lot of planning!

My guide was glad to park me on the ship, in some safe place, where I couldn't wander off or get into trouble. He needed the break!

Oh, sloppy Joes, onion rings, fried okra, and tomatoes—pecan pie for a chaser—with ice water, it really had ice in it! The first ice I have seen in two months.

By the way the bagging machines broke down a while ago. This is a holiday in the DPRK and no one or nothing wants to work today. I collect my information for the port report; do some faxing at the hotel—the line only goes to Pyongyang. I went back to the ship at 3:00 p.m. and the Captain was glad to see me.

He shared his testimony of how he became a Christian when he was a Mercedes mechanic in California. He was machining a part for a car which gave him 20 minutes of unoccupied time. He picked up a Reader's Digest and read a story about Jesus. He was so impressed that he decided if Jesus was just that good and not the Son of God, He would be worth following. He said, "I bowed my head and prayed. The Holy Spirit made His presence know in my heart, my sins were forgiven, and I was a new man."

He found out that I had been a mechanic, we were both from aristocratic families (from France; de La Noue de Vair family and from Germany; Von Rettberg family), both own Rottweiler dogs, both have experience with the sea and both knew ships, both are: Christians and pray a lot—we maybe soul mates!

He insisted that I stay for dinner—I did, it was sirloin steak and baked potatoes---
Heaven!

Vignette 6:

I thoroughly enjoyed the crew and the American food on board the "Motor Vessel Overseas Harriet". This vignette is an example. The captain had an amazing effect on the atmosphere of the ship's crew. His faith in Christ was key to his relationship to his crew and their faith. The whole ship had a spiritual cover over it.

God had been orchestrating these contacts, the meetings with believers at my most lonesome moments, the delightful uplifting dietary change, and the encouragement I was to the crew of the ship.

They were very concerned about the use of the cargo they were delivering. The fact that I would be monitoring the delivery to the hungry people and not to the military was a comfort to them. My fellowship with their captain; my camaraderie with the crew, my prayers for them and with them were a solidifying factor in our sense of having a joint mission. It even had the "Italian Stallion", Fred, under conviction. He said, "My God! Dr. John are you a priest?" I said, "Baptist preacher." In his Bronx accent he said, "Man I don't care, I am cat'lick and I'm gonna call you 'Fodder' that's all. The title I got that fits ya. Would you hear my confession?"

A steward (55 years old) said, "Man he's a Baptist! You don't confess to him, you confess to Jesus! Man, he's the one that get's you straight!"

Fred said, “Look, I been sorta sinful, ya know what I mean? And if dis ship sinks or gets blown outa da wa’tah, I don’t want to talk about dis with da Big Man upstairs—I wan t it outta da way!”

I talked to him at length and he did confess his sins. I told him that I would pray for him and I did. He was grateful for my prayer, but would not pray with me a prayer for his salvation. God is working on him in a big way. Maybe the Captain will be used to finish the job.

One old seaman from Lake Charles, Louisiana, said, “Dr. John, if you do decide to hear Fred’s confession, you best bring a thermos, a big lunch, and an easy chair, because it will take all day.”

What a bunch—it certainly did bring back memories of my work with Geophysical Services, Inc. in the Gulf of Mexico, and the crew of my ship. When I got to the dock, I looked up to see the Captain waving at me from the rail—we exchanged salutes and they left.

Vignette 7:

My guide and I enjoyed a good relationship. When he discovered I was eager to help him with his English vocabulary, grammar, and American slang. He was so eager to learn and had a brilliant mind; it was a pleasure to do it. It was my main recreation.

Today, after the ship, I am “spiritually” up—I have seen God at work!

My guide, for whom I have gained respect and esteem, came into my room and said, “I’m lonesome. Can we visit?” It was followed by over 2 hours of dialog—lights were out for 2 hours also, so I got my candles out and lit one. He said, “Dr. John you are an exact man!” That means prepared, dedicated, scrupulous, picky and several other things. So, you always need to think of the context of the situation before you attach any meaning to their vocabulary.

One day he interrupted my prayer time and said again, “Dr. John you are an exact man! You really believe your religion. You pray and read your book as much as Billy Graham did when he was here.”

He believes religion is from man’s mind. He gave the exact argument every atheistic humanist gives. I still pray for him.

Vignette 8:

One day the face of the whole population changed. There were parades with chanting and singing. Women were beating pots and pans with wooden spoons.

This vignette explains the occasion and the opportunity it provided.

“The 10/10/97 Celebration”—The Day the Democratic People’s Workers Party was organized in 1945 by General Kim Il Sung is approaching. General Kim Jong Il is being installed as Chairman of the Party.

The Lord gave me an open door yesterday. A real answer to weeks of prayer, we were eating an apple and some alternative food in the county office and the FDRC Chairman started asking me questions, which gave me an opportunity to share my testimony.

I felt led to tell them that my reason for being in the DPRK was not as a representative of the United States or Amigos Internacionales. It was my religion that inspired me to do these things. And, because I am a deeply religious man, I pray daily for your leader, Kim Jung Il, I pray for him to have the knowledge, wisdom and guidance to lead you through this crisis and bring you to a time of peace, safety and prosperity. When I finished my testimony, the Koreans

cheered and shouted “Thank you!” With that statement, I was telling a group of atheist that I was a Christian man, I was praying to a God they didn’t believe in, praying for their leader to be blessed by coming to know the truth (Jesus), and they thanked me enthusiastically!

I stayed at the Chongjin Guest House while I was monitoring the unloading and distribution of the corn from the Overseas Harriet. There was an eight foot wall around the grounds with broken glass on top and a guarded front gate.

The huge celebration over the event of General Kim Jong Il’s election as head of the Worker’s Party effected the staff of the Guest House. They had a celebration including novelty sports, folk dancing, singing, and a picnic. They involved me in the novelty sports. It was a comedy of major proportions! My partner in the three legged race and the “two in a hula hoop” race was the girl who brought my two buckets of hot water every morning.

Her name was Miyung, but the manager called her “Yungee”. The big laugh was when she had to teach me the folk dances. Everyone was moving like willows in the wind and I was more like an oak stump. She finally took me aside and tried to teach me the footwork. Hana, dul, set, she chanted (one, two, and three) as she taught me the steps. The final blow fell when they said I had to sing for them. Singing is a custom at all of their picnics and family celebrations. But, me sing, I don’t sing!

Their request to sing was not really an invitation but a command to perform! I began to pray, I did not have time for a King James type prayer. I just prayed, “Oh, God! What am I going to do? I don’t sing, I preach! The problem is that I had never been able to carry a tune. I blanked and could not remember any song lyrics. I don’t have a book! HELP!!

I knew I was in trouble!

On the way to the microphone, I remembered “Amazing Grace.” The public address sound system was enormous. It was the type used in broadcasting the patriotic songs and speeches every morning. It could be heard over a very large area as it echoed off the hard surfaced parking lot and through the moist sea air. I began to sing acappella, and I was shocked by the mellow baritone voice coming from the loudspeaker. It gave me such confidence that I added hand, head, and body movements to emphasize the message. My translator was struggling with the message, but finally finished when I did.

The crowd sat in absolute silence for several minutes. The manager broke the silence with, “I have never heard an American song before! I have never heard an American sing before. It was beautiful!” I smiled, bowed to their applause, and nearly fell forward on my face when the manager shouted, “You must sing again for us NOW!”

I prayed again! I could just hear my guardian angel say to the angel who taught Balaam’s donkey to speak Hebrew, “You think you had a hard job, listen to this request!” The only other song I could think of was the love song I sing to my wife, privately. It is written in an earlier chapter, but repeated here for convenience.

I introduced it with the explanation that it was a love song. It was the song I usually sang only for my wife. I told them I had not seen her for several months as I served the people of the DPRK.

My translator was able to handle the lyrics easily, and I could see from the facial expressions they were getting the message.

It says:

God gave to the wise men their wisdom,
To the poet their hopes and their dreams,
To Dad and Mother He gave each other,

Not a soul was left out so it seems,
But, I thought that I been forgotten,
That life was an empty affair,
But when God gave me you,
It was then that I knew,
That I gotten more than my share!

The crowd burst into applause and most of them were wiping tears from their faces.

God is good! Balaam's donkey has nothing on me! But the rest of the story came in the night. I was praying and asking God why I had been put in such a situation. As I prayed, He reminded me that the Korean Christian Churches sang their Korean hymn lyrics to American hymn tunes.

My singing, being broadcast over that area of the city, might be heard by some Korean Christian. They would be uplifted and encouraged to hear the melody of Amazing Grace broadcasted in their city.

Vignette 9:

I had spent two weeks in Chongjin and was returning to Pyongyang. The train was supposed to arrive at 7:00 p.m. It was late, 12 hours late and no announcements were ever made. It was your responsibility to watch the station and catch it when it came. In this vignette, I share an incident that illustrates what happened so many times as I lived and shared my faith with others. This contains an example of how God answered prayer directly to challenge unbelief.

The train came at 7:00 but it was a.m., not the p.m. of last night. As I lugged my 85 lb. suitcase through the station (the wheels had come off on the trip in) I wondered how long the 19 hour trip to Pyongyang would be this time. Since the train was 12 hours behind already. The answer would come in time!

Mr. Kim had purchased some food for the trip. "You get yours this time, and I'll get mine", he said because mine was too much meat and bread, he wanted rice, fish, noodles, and kimchi (he had traded four of my candy bars for a bowl of kimchi on the way out.) I had been praying and fasting about the situation and had planned to fast on the trip home. When he saw me not eating, he bothered me to death about eating something. I finally gave in and when I opened my pack he shoved a bowl of Ramen noodles in my hands and said, "Eat this with me."

I said, "This must have hot water."

He said, "I know. Give me two of your candy bars." He returned in 20 minutes with this large tea kettle full of boiling water. Two days, three bowls of noodles and six candy bars later we are arriving in Pyongyang 37:09 hours in route.

We were stalled several times and spent hours at a time without moving. The last time, 45 Km from Pyongyang, was a four hour power failure. My guide was so frustrated, his wife (whom he had not been with in two months—he had to live with us at the hotel, while his wife and child are only 15 minutes away). They were to meet us at the train station and we were two days late. He was frantic!

He walked around the whole train as I read my Bible in the compartment. He came in, saw me reading, and said, "Would you ask your God, if he really exists, to turn on the electricity so we can go home! I want to see my wife!"

We had already spent hours on this trip in Atheist/Christian dialog and he did this as a jab at my argument for a personal God. I said, "OK I am going to talk to my God in a few minutes and I will ask Him to do that." He laughed and walked out. I looked at my watch 7:00 p.m., I began to pray, at 7:05 p.m. the lights in the train came on brightly. I laughed and thanked Him, and kept praying about other things.

At 7:15 p.m. the electric locomotive lurched forward toward Pyongyang. Kim had to run to catch the observation platform on the end of the train. He came into the compartment with a blank look on his face, I looked him in the eyes and smiled, and he stuck out his hand for a hand shake, adding a "high five". He went back out into the hallway to wait until I finished. Oh, is God ever good!

When he came back in, God told me to ask, "Is there anything else you need?" He had his back to me, but looked over his shoulder and smiled. "Power Witnessing" is when you tell people about God and then believe that He will demonstrate His power to them in such a way that no one can doubt who He is. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him!" (Hebrews 11)

So often, when I prayed God took such immediate action that it left my minders astounded. Before the end of my tour of duty, when that ask for something and I said that I would pray about it, they would smile and say, "Good."

Vignette 10:

In the course of my daily Bible readings I read Psalm 33 early one morning. The words of verse 18 through 20 seemed especially meaningful. "But the eyes of the Lord are watching over those who fear Him, who rely on His steady love. He will keep them from death even in times of famine! We depend upon the Lord alone to save us. Only He can help us; He protects us like a shield."

The monitoring journey, that day, took us high in a mountainous area. The narrow dirt roads were carved out of the mountainside, leaving a wall of rock and dirt on one side and a sheer cliff on the other. A truck had stalled and blocked part of the road and our driver had pulled out to go around him. Suddenly the canvas top of an army truck appeared roaring up the mountain road, our driver froze, the army driver locked his brakes, this causing him to skid straight for the side of our car.

The army truck was headed straight for my door. All I could pray was, "God help us!" The truck came within two feet of my door and the skid suddenly changed directions. The truck skidded to the left and went over the cliff. I could hear the men screaming as it rolled and tumbled down 100 feet to a ledge and stopped.

My mountaineering and first responder training took over. I dashed out of the car, started to climb down the cliff with my guide yelling, "No, no, no!" I stopped, looked back and he screamed, "We must get you out of here!" I looked down and saw one soldier with a gash in his head trying to climb up the wall. I anchored my legs to a rock and reached down to pull him up. When he saw the face of a white bearded American trying to help him, his eyes widened in disbelief, he paused, and then grabbed my extended hand for a lift to the cliff top.

By this time my guide was frantic, he rushed me toward the car door, but I froze when I saw the skid marks. They looked like a check mark in the road. The truck had skidded straight for my car door, and then changed directions, as if they had hit a wall or barrier.

The Scripture said He will keep you alive in famine and that He protects us like a shield; God had faxed me a promise from His word the very day I needed it.

By the way, the truck that was stalled in the road was a mobile clinic! Instant help was immediately available.

Vignette 11:

After our adventure on the mountain road, we returned to the Koryo Hotel. It had been a long hard day and I was ready for a shower and a bed. The shower consisted of me standing over the drain in the center of the tile floor and dipping water from the bath tub to pour over my head.

With the shower finished, I dried off and spotted the blood pressure equipment in my shaving kit. John II had insisted that I use it daily because of the stress related to my work. It has been weeks since I arrived in the DPRK and this was the first time I thought to use it. As a matter of fact, with no TV, no radio, no newspapers or magazines, it became my entertainment for the evening.

I tested the pressure in my left arm, and then I wondered if it were the same in my right arm? Does it make a difference if you are standing, sitting, or reclining? What if you are reclining with your feet propped up on the wall higher than your head. After at least eight different tests I decided to read my Bible and spend time, a lot of time, in prayer.

The next morning, after breakfast, my guide came running to me with a worried look on his face, asking, “Mr. John are you all right? Is your blood pressure okay? Is your heart bothering you?” I reassured him I was fine, but made a mental note to be sure I had clothes on when I came out of the shower next time. I laughed at the way my mind played with this proof of no privacy. Since it was a one way mirror, I started chanting to myself in the back seat of the car on our monitoring trips.

“Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of us all? Mirror, mirror on the wall did you see me in the shower at all? Mirror, mirror let us give it a whirl. I hope you are a boy and not a girl!”

My son had told me that I would be under constant surveillance. He said to get the fullest impact of my Christian witness I should read my Bible out loud and pray out loud. I paid more attention to him after that.

I was frequently able to practice the spiritual disciplines of silence, solitude, simplicity, meditation and fasting. These produced tremendous opportunities for the Holy Spirit to communicate truth in new depths of understanding to me. No telephone, no radio, no television, no newspaper, no magazines, and frequently there was only one person who spoke English; this gave me plenty of time for study and meditation.

The burdens I was carrying in my heart required constant prayer. I cannot walk in a disaster and not have a heart for what I see, a heart for the hurting people. To keep from being emotionally crushed by these burdens, I pray.

I have come to understand the divisions of labor and responsibility. God walks with me through these broken and heartbreaking places. I do what He directs me to do with the resources He provides. At the end of the day, I thank Him for the ministry He has given me and for what He has allowed to be accomplished through me. I follow this with hours of prayer, laying each person and /or need that I could help before Him. I can only do what he enables me to do. Since I trust Him and His sovereignty, so I can commit everything to Him and trust Him to deal with it. I carry the concern and I do not cease to look for methods and resources to fill the needs, but the weight of the burdens is in God’s hands not mine.

Vignette 12:

For hours tonight God focused my mind on the innocent ones I had seen earlier. One of them in particular, I will name him “Innocence”. My little 2 ½ year old sized child who was actually 6 or 7. I claim him as mine because God kept him in my mind and heart for 6 weeks.

In an elementary classroom I saw him, front row left, 1st seat. His head was tilted down to his left, leaning on the little girl by his side. His eyes were rolled my way with a sad, frightened look. My 1st thought was, “a bashful, frightened little fellow. I’ll not look directly at him. Maybe he will straighten up if I don’t seem to be a threat.”

I obtained permission to video the class as they sang for me. Through the glass eye of the camera I took an oblique, but better, look at “Innocence”. His little arms, legs, and neck were skin covered bones. He wasn’t turning away because he was bashful, he could not hold his head up, nor sit up. The little girl on his left was holding him up by leaning against him. His eyes were tearing but unfocused, he was a tiny portrait of misery, and “Innocence” was dying. There are no I. V. sets at his hospital, no glucose available to sustain him. No personal, loving arms to hold him and comfort him. He is a lonely, sick, little bundle of dying boy, some proud father’s son, some loving mother’s baby. The baby she carried for 9 months as she worked in the factory or the field, the baby she carried on her back for two years, the baby she nursed for a year, the child who was the focus of the Korean family into which he was born—was lonely, miserable, and dying.

Shortly after he was weaned, the DPRK entered a 3 year siege of floods, hail, drought, and finally a crop destroying typhoon. He lost his mother’s sustenance as his nation’s food supply was disappearing from the home into which he was born. All of the people receive their food through local distribution centers. The “Ration” each person receives is based on the amount of calories they need to do their work, not on how much they want. The ration was: Hard labor is 800 grams per day; children 400 grams per day; older youth 600 grams; school teachers, intellectuals, and senior adults 450 grams per day. The natural disasters have reduced the daily ration to 100-150 grams per day, when grain is available.

Little Innocence had had no oil, no milk, very little rice, but mostly corn for months. His ration has probably been about 1 ½ oz of corn per meal. His level of nutrition has been drifting lower and lower. It has been moving toward the level of starvation where the body slows its metabolism to the point where his intestines stop operating and atrophy begins. The corn he eats now passes through his body, but he cannot absorb any nutrients from it. With out medical help, little Innocence is going to die, and I cannot touch him. I am a frightening foreigner and would only compound his misery.

I hate cameras in the presence of personal tragedy. For me to look at personal tragedy, miserable refugees, victims of violence or trauma through a camera lens are a total aberration of everything I am. I wanted to curse the camera for being between me and Innocence, but it was the least frightening way I could find to take Innocence into my heart.

My arms and shoulders quivered—they ached to embrace Innocence. Even as I write, my chest feels cheated because it was never a comforting place of rest for Innocence. My arms feel as though their purpose has been aborted because they never were able to form a circle of support and protection around Innocence. My hands feel severed from their calling—to hold the hopeless, to help the helpless, to fill the hands of the destitute. My hands feel unfulfilled because they never held Innocence!

For weeks, every quiet moment has brought to the lower left corner of my mind's eye, a vision of Innocence. Unless a miracle occurred, Innocence is dead. And with him died my innocence. I have seen the need; I can no longer be innocent if I do not help. I have investigated, gathered information, made calculations and I know the truth; that without outside help, hunger will again stalk this land before spring.

My Little Boy, Innocence

Innocence, one among the temporary survivors of the storm.

They did not ask to be born,
They did not want to die,
But, like the ticking of a clock
Their little bodies drop.

In their mother's arms, they were before
Now their weak little arms cannot hug or hold her anymore
On this earth, their little feet will walk no more
For they are gone . . .

Yes my little boy, Innocence, is gone
And my personal innocence is gone

No longer can I plead ignorance of their plight
The bony limbs and bloated bellies are never out of sight
I still see their hollow faces and pleading eyes
Even in the silence of the night, I hear their silent cries,
"Can you, will you help me?"

Being thousands of miles away, does not dim the vision of the hungry, thirsty, sick and dying who are our mission. Please excuse my impatience in meetings about who will control what, or in conferences about what is theologically important or not, over the meetings at church and the clamor of conventions about who will operate what—I keep hearing the rhythm, like the ticking of a clock, the sound that is made when their little bodies drop.

Because of Innocence I have been working in North Korea for the last 13 years.
Dr. John La Noue, Sr.

Vignette 13:

There is a shortage of salt, so the people in coastal areas are using sea water to process their Kimchi. At Wonsan harbor, people were dipping up tubs of sea water from the area where 12 ships were anchored. These ships are not US licensed, so all of their latrines ("Heads") are flushed into the ocean. I am looking at a Cholera and E-coli epidemic in the making.

When my guide told me of the devastation of the evaporative salt farms, I told him that I had seen them on the West coast. The process called for flooding shallow sections of a field with sea water and letting it evaporate. The remaining sea salt would be scooped up and further processed. Kimchi is very important to this culture. They store vegetables in those 40 gallon

pots of brine and spice for the year—they don't can or freeze things. The vegetables, mainly cabbage and radishes, will rot if not kept in the pots for fermentation. The Germans did the same thing with sauerkraut.

The typhoon that destroyed the sea wall dykes deposited mud over the salt farms to a depth that made them unusable until they were rebuilt.

He asked if I could help them get salt for their vegetable preservation (Kimchi). I said, "I do not have any salt or money to buy salt, but, I will pray about it." He rolls his eyes as if to say, "What good will that do?" and walked away.

When our group went to the World Food Program building that evening, I was able to get an email out to my boss, Bob Dixon of Texas Baptist Men, asking for money. He was at the BGCT annual Convention.

Bob told the Convention that he was donating \$20,000 toward this need. The International Mission Board responded with a \$10,000 donation and the Texas Baptist World Hunger Fund donated \$30,000. All of this took about 30 hours. When the Fax came that told me I had \$60,000 for salt, I went to my guide and told him, "God has answered prayer. He sent \$60,000 for salt in only 30 hours!"

He looked stunned and said, "You have a mighty God and He works fast!"

I was able to purchase salt from China for \$27.00 per metric tonne (2200 lbs). It was a train load! The load was 2,222.22 metric tones. Each Korean family uses about 14 pounds of salt to preserve the vegetables for winter. This meant that 349,206 families could make their kimchi.

This type of event; praying for a need that people have expressed and having God respond so powerfully, I call power witnessing. It is simply you praying and God responding with power.

Vignette 14:

A different guide was assigned to me for the last two weeks I was in the DPRK. He was wonderful! He had been the ambassador to Cuba and spoke beautiful Spanish. He was the one who asked for salt and was surprised by the rapid and generous answer that came when I prayed.

At the airport, on the day of my departure, he asked, "What will you say about us when you get to America?" I replied, "My assignment from my God is to help your people, not to criticize you or your country." "Thank you!" he replied and added, "Your face will be welcome in any delegation that comes to our country." That was a supreme compliment for an American to receive!

When my flight was called, he shook my hand and said, "One final request, many of the rural children you saw in the countryside do not have winter coats. It will be 0 degrees centigrade in the unheated class rooms. Can you help us get winter coats?"

"How many do you need?" I queried.

He responded, "180,000 would really help."

I said, "I do not have any, but I will pray about it."

"Good!" he replied with wide eyes and huge smile.

God has been, is, and will be doing His work in impossible situations. Trust Him!

The International Mission Board received my recommendations for twenty-two possible projects to help the DPRK and to help keep the door open for ministry there. They were excited

about the winter coat project. They were so excited that they rushed the idea to the Southern Baptist Churches.

The SBC churches made a tremendous coat drive.

In January, we had over 75,000 winter coats and enough money to buy 25,000 winter coats with fur lined hoods in China. Other funds and supplies were collected and we chartered an AN124 airplane from the Ukraine. At the time, it was the largest aircraft available. It carried the 75,000 winter coats, 20,000 pounds of pediatric medicines, and 40,000 pounds of seed corn.

I went through China and bought the 25,000 coats. While I was distributing these in the Northern provinces, the plane landed in Pyongyang and began to distribute its cargo.

On board the plane was another answered prayer. It was a rancher from Arizona who spoke Korean. He had been in contact with us and expressed his calling from God to work in the DPRK. The miracle in this was his anointing by God to establish relationships with North Koreans. It had taken me three months to gain the trust and respect of the people; they call it, “gaining face.” He “gained face” with them in four days!

It was as if I had handed him the baton in a relay race. The ministry never slowed down; instead, it has continued to gain momentum. The ministry continues. . .

The DPRK ask our new leader if he would give his organization a non religious name that did not sound like it was helping a helpless country. Since Amigos Internacionales was a part of the consortium of five groups, it had to leave when the consortium project closed.

The rancher and the DPRK representative agreed on “Global Resource Services.” For fourteen years that group has worked miracles in helping the people of the DPRK.

I have been blessed with the opportunity to continue to minister in the DPRK through this organization.

Vignette 15:

The ministry to the DPRK has been varied and nothing short of miraculous. Global Resource Services has been able to accomplish more than I could have ever imagined. As with the disaster unit and its ministry, God used me in the initial phase of the work. He replaced me with people who had the ability to grow and develop the ministry, people who were visionaries!

The key to coordinated work in God’s service is to work at the ministry with all your heart, but never let it get in your heart as your possession. Keep it in your hand as you do with all of the God given resources. Nothing is your to keep. Always be ready to hand the baton to the next runner God puts in the race.

I have been invited by GRS to participate in several of their DPRK ministries. The one I have chosen to share in this vignette was a medical ministry in which my son and I served together. What a joy it was to work side by side with my son, a pediatric surgeon, in the DPRK.

The GRS leader put out a request from the DPRK for training in laparoscopic surgery. For years my unofficial “junk for Jesus” operation, had been the benefactor of several East Texas hospital’s surplus property departments. So, I volunteered to look for equipment. I always begin my search with prayer. Since I was looking for thousands of dollars worth of equipment, I prayed a lot!

My son, John II, and one of his partners, Tom Renard, M.D. volunteered to go as instructors. John II had served with me in the Bam, Iran, earthquake in January and now a few months later, we were headed for the DPRK together.

John II recommended that I look for the type of equipment he usually uses in his practice. In my file I found an old contact with the Stryker Company. When I called, the person answering said the former salesman had retired, but he kept the same cell phone number. When I explained what I was looking for, he paused and said, "Meet me at my warehouse in Tyler, Texas tomorrow!"

His first words to me at the warehouse were, "I have been praying that God would let me have a ministry through my job. Your call was a great blessing!" He got his company to donate two full sets of laparoscopic surgical equipment. Probably several hundred thousand dollars in used equipment went into our packing crates.

Before we packed it up, he set up training sessions to instruct me how to set up, operate the equipment, and do minor repairs. They did not teach that in Seminary! My prayers were answered, so far, but I was not through seeking God's guidance.

What tools, what supplies, what electrical meters and mechanical apparatus should I take? What spare parts would we need? Everyone was telling me I was gathering too much stuff and we would not need any of it because everything we needed was packed. I kept accumulating and packing.

The staff of the hospital and medical school in Pyongyang gave us a great welcome! Then the unpacking began. I began to hear. "pop, pppop, pop." I turned around and saw two young nurses popping the bubble wrap. Some things are the same all over the world.

We laid the equipment, cables, and other items on long tables. The items were arranged in sequence of connection. Suddenly a doctor stepped into the room, grabbed a camera cable, held it up and said, "That is just the connector I need!" as he cut the five pin connector off with his scissors, and left the room. My spare parts box had a bag of those connectors and extra cable, no problem.

John II said, "Dad, we are in trouble. The hospital only has 20 of the titanium clips used to close veins, arteries, ducts, etc. I brought 80 in my pocket. We can't do much with so few clips."

I asked if there were some other way to close them. He said, "Yes, the old way was to use sutures. You tie the knot outside the body and run it down around the vessel with a knot pusher or endoloop. But, I have to work through a 5mm trocar (a tubular device that penetrates the abdominal wall), so it must be very small in diameter."

"Knot Pusher?" I asked? He drew pictures of two types. I got two large stainless steel key rings made of the right diameter metal, straighten them out into rods, flattened the ends, notched and drilled 1.5 mm holes in them. Then I buffed and polished the work so no chaffing of the sutures would occur. God had led me to pack metal working tools and a Dremel tool with drill bits and polish wheels. I actually used some, if not all, of

everything I brought! God is so good

Dr. John II said, "Dad, I did not know you could do that!"

I replied, "I never have needed to until now."

When the surgery began, I had an additional task of monitoring the combination voltage regulator and uninterrupted power supply. It would bring any voltage above 187 volts up to 220 volts. When I monitored the hospital electrical system, I never had more than 189 volts in the line. If it dropped below 187 volts, an alarm would sound, signaling the failure and starting of the "fifteen minutes until shut down: process".

During the surgery, the power would drop about every 20 minutes, the alarm would sound, and I would lay hands on it and start panic praying! When the voltage came up and the

alarm shut off I would lift one hand from the machine, raise it high, and praise God in my “Baptical” way!

The first surgery chosen for the training was an extremely difficult one. John II and Tom did a miraculous job that amazed all of the doctors. The head surgical nurse came out, leaned against the wall and said, “Your son is amazing! He worked like magic! He is precious! Guard him well!”

I visited the hospital three years later and the staff said, “Halabaji (Grandfather), your son’s name is held in high esteem among us!: And when I visited the operating room, the nurses held my end loops up and yelled, “Halabaji!” One of the blessings of the thirteen year ministry in the DPRK had been the transformation from “that American monitor” to “grandfather.”

As I write this manuscript, a powerful love and respect for the people of the DPRK swells up in my heart. I love them because God loves them so much, and has permitted me to be an expression of His love to them.

Oh, by the way, at the debriefing at the end of my first trip to the DPRK. One of my guides said, “Dr. John, while you were here you prayed more than Dr. Billy Graham!”

I replied, “I needed it more!”

Chapter 24

Bosnia-Herzegovina Serbia

I have chosen to list these two mission ventures together, because of their proximity, same personnel, and continuance of ministry. The region was torn by the conflicts of genocide and NATO attacks on the warring parties.

Ben and Meredith Hanna were missionaries in Belgrade, Serbia when the hostilities broke out. Ben had been in contact with the American Embassy, which had evacuated all non-essential personnel. Ben told them to notify him when the final orders came to evacuate all personnel, because he wanted to stay and minister to the last minute. That call came early one morning informing him of the NATO bombings which were to start later that day and they did!

Ben, Meredith, and their two small children packed everything they could into their car and headed for the border between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serb border guards would not let them cross. They were traveling with another missionary, Randy Bell, who told them of a way to escape through the back roads in the mountains into Bosnia. The journey through the mountains took twelve hours. There was one bridge left standing when they crossed the border leaving Serbia, their home, and their mission field behind them. Their erratic journey to discover their new field of service took them through Wiesbaden, Germany, Greece, and Macedonia, before settling in the city of Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina. They realized this new field of service was going to be a difficult field ministry. Normally under these circumstances, human wisdom and mission strategies are not sufficient to break through the spiritual blockade, which has formed where Satan has been so active. The Hannas knew that the power of God focused through prayer would be needed to break through the spiritual blockade of the area and the spiritual bondage of the people.

Ben called the Texas Baptist Men's office in Dallas and asked for help. Ben had served as a Royal Ambassador state staffer as a youth. He asked for a group to come to Banja Luka to join them in prayer. He was asking for a group who would walk the streets of the city and pray by day and to spend the evenings with them, praying as a group. Eight people volunteered to go. At the last moment two of the couples had to cancel, leaving Jered and Kay Sellers from the First Baptist Church of Plains, Texas, my wife, Dr. L. and myself.

When we arrived we discovered a city filled with grieving people. Many had been forced from their homes by the army or the rebels and had lost everything they owned. Their houses had been destroyed, all the personal belonging they could not carry were lost, their livestock was left to fend for itself, and they joined the crowds of refugees cramming the roads fleeing for their lives.

I sensed a strong spirit of evil in the city. This feeling is difficult to explain, but I have experienced this in many foreign countries where we have worked. It is a combination of sensations: a sense of foreboding, spiritual resistance, a feeling of oppression, and sometimes heaviness in the atmosphere that seemed to weigh on your chest. I knew that we were in Satan's territory and he was furious. Some of the lessons I have learned in these situations:

Your planning and preparation does not frighten Satan, your praying does

You must pray that God will protect your mind and prevent it from accepting confusion, negativity or depression

You must pray for your personal safety and the safety of your crew, this includes praying for Angel guardians to stand between you and violence from the enemy

You must pray for every aspect of your days activities, for everything from drinking water, food, transportation and places where you might go

You must pray that God will lead you in every casual and intentional contact

You must pray that God will make you alert and sensitive to every situation He has prepared for you to give a witness

You must pray that God will put a filter on your eyes, ears, and mouth; because the Devil will try to distract you with what you see and hear, and you might pollute the situation by what you say (one thoughtless comment can blow away a day of ministry)

You must pray for God to give you a genuine love for the people among who you walk, and pray that His love can be seen in your eyes and His compassion be seen in your face

You must pray for God to put a covering of the blood of Jesus and the power of His name over the mission, missionary families, your team, and your family at home, because Satan can work in any of these areas and debilitate your effectiveness.

All of this must be done before you begin your ministry of prayer and prayer walking in the field which God has assigned.

Ben took us to the Kamel Hotel, a small hotel on a side street with a bakery across the street, thank the Lord! Between the hotel and the intersection of the streets there was a wood yard. We discovered every one heated with fire wood. There was a traffic light at the intersection where I saw a comical scene or perhaps a comical tragedy. An old man with a horse drawn wagon was waiting for the traffic light. Extending over his wagon all the way to the horses rump was the muzzle of the cannon on a British tank. Behind the tank was a new Volvo. It was quite a scene, the mixture of the old Bosnian famer with the wagon, the modern Bosnian in the new Volvo, with a deadly instrument of war between them.

The Hannas had rented a small home in the city, but to keep from disturbing their children, our late night prayer meetings took place at the hotel. We went to a mountain on the outskirts of the city, which had a huge statue on top of it. We spent several hours focusing on various area of the city which was laid out before us on the valley floor. We stood for a long time seeking God's direction for each area upon which we focused. We prayed for God to reveal the needs of the people in each area. After a long period of silent praying, we began to pray aloud about the things the Father had shown us. In order for this type of prayer to be productive we had spent several hours in prayer for God to clear our minds and to make us sensitive to His leadership.

The next day we began our prayer walking in the city. We averaged approximately ten miles a day according to my wife's pedometer. We started our prayer walk at the place where most of the city of Banja Luka comes at least once a week, the market place. We had walked only a few feet into the market when my prayer focus became a jumbled, erratic, and confused mess. I had been praying for specific things for our team and its ministry. I was also praying about the people shopping, and those who were selling in the market. Suddenly the concentration was gone. There was a powerful cloud of evil around us. I turned and looked back at the others and their faces were pictures of confusion. I turned and motioned them to go out of the market and back up the street where we had been. I called for a huddle and said, "Folks, we just ran into strong presence of evil. I could not even think straight." They all nodded and agreed with me. We stayed in the huddle for quite a while and prayed that God would break the power of the evil we felt, that He would bind Satan and all of his demonic

forces, and give us victory over this resistance. We prayed for quite a while. It seemed as if the day literally grew brighter around us and we sensed that God had done His work.

We re-entered the market area and felt complete freedom. As we strolled from kiosk to kiosk, we prayed for every person we saw. The strangest thing began to happen, as it has happened on every prayer walk, God began to reveal to us the various needs of the people for whom we prayed. It actually made the prayer for every person unique. We prayed for children in the city parks, we prayed in the halls of university buildings, we prayed in and around the perimeter of the Eastern Orthodox Church, we prayed in residential areas, we prayed for each individual home, we prayed for those we met on the streets and during this time we were conscious of the power presence of the Holy Spirit.

We came to a bistro with an open front and tables all the way into the street. It was packed with young people in mod clothes. All of the men were wearing leather jackets and dark glasses. We stopped across the street and prayed for the young people. We prayed for their minds, for their education, for them to be given a spiritual hunger for Jesus, and for them to find a meaning for their lives. We prayed for them until the Holy Spirit released us to move on. The next day we prayed through the same area and the bistro was almost empty.

People would smile and nod at us when our eyes met. The presence of God was so strong with us; I believe that the people could sense the compassion and love of God in our faces. The people on the street often had warmth about them after we passed, they would keep looking back and smiling. They did not do this because we were Americans, because we were dressed just as they were. I wore a black beret and dark clothing, as did the others. Frequently, when we did not respond to the greetings in the native language, they would immediately launch into one of the second languages of the country, Russian or German. I would respond in my limited German.

When darkness came we went to a restaurant with the Hanna family for dinner, then back to our hotel to review the day's activities and launch our evening prayer session.

One day Ben felt led to take us to the neighboring city of Prijador. On the way, we passed bombed out houses, crowds of refugees and drove over war damaged roads. We were told there were 30,000 Serbian refugees in Prijador.

We passed a huge abandoned ceramics factory. There were people everywhere in and around the building. You could tell they were refugees. They looked so frightened. As the Serbian refugees came in from other cities and towns where they had been forced out, they would take over any empty building they found. Families were camped out in every room of the factory. It had been abandoned and some of the windows were broken out.

We walked among them. We prayed for them. We prayed with them. We interviewed them and tried to comfort them. I discovered their greatest fear was the coming winter. They shared with me that the snow sometimes was over 3 meters deep (over 9 feet) and they did not have warm clothes or any way to heat the building. We prayed with them for God to bless them and meet their needs. In our evening prayer meeting we labored long and hard for God to supply a way for the needs of the people to be met, and met in such a way as to bring glory to Him.

The next day Ben received word that someone had ordered 140 wood stoves that no one had come to claim and they ask if Ben could use them? We celebrated and thanked God for His miraculous answer to our prayer. Why were we surprised? That same day Ben received a call telling him he was about to receive a \$6,000.00 check to spend on the refugees. This was followed by another call that made a 40 foot container full of woolen winter underwear available

for his distribution. The bottom line to the answered prayers were, enough stoves to heat the factory, enough fire wood to see them through the winter and woolen underwear to help stay warm. Praise the Lord!

Our next project of prayer concerned the Hanna's need to get Ben back in Serbia to check on their apartment and make application to re-enter the country to continue their work. We prayed, until after midnight, for Ben to get a visa. When God gave us peace about the situation, we closed our prayer meeting and went to bed. We waited for Ben to pick us up the next morning after breakfast, but he never came. I called his wife to check on him and she said, "Last night Ben received word that he could obtain a visa to re-enter Serbia, if he could catch the train in Croatia for Serbia by 3:00 a.m. He made it! Praise the Lord!"

Eventually, he was permitted to return to Serbia and live in the town of Nis (pronounced Nish).

The Hannas were joined by the Karl Bannert family in Serbia. In their mission strategy meeting they decided to ask Texas Baptist Men for a combination medical and prayer walking team. TBM responded by sending Dr. James Furgerson, MD, the Sellers family, and the La Noues. We were grateful for the privilege of working with the Serbs again. We had come to love the people. It was a double privilege to work with the mission team and the ministry team.

Our mission team had made such an impact on the city of Nis that a number of Serbian Christian Physicians had expressed a desire to join them in a medical project. TBM had sent a container of medical supplies which was stationed on the parking lot of a building where they hoped to start a clinic. In addition to this, the mission team had planned to do a mobile clinic in one of the villages, while we were there.

As the prayer team leader my concern was basically with the spiritual advance on this mission site. Dr. Furgerson was responsible for organizing and handling the clinic and the pharmacy. We needed both very badly, because our mobile clinic site was a Serbian Gypsy village. The Gypsies were considered the lower class of citizens. Breaking into that kind of community spiritually would be very difficult! But the Father has a way of accomplishing whatever He desires if we will stay faithful and be courageous.

Our team was given an empty house for the clinic site. We had no idea about the number of people who would come, because we had no publicity. By the time we had unpacked the boxes and set up the clinic, the house was full of patients and there was a long line outside. God had blessed us so much; we had to re-organize our team. We put Kay Sellers, an inhalation therapist, as Dr. Furgerson's nurse. Jered Sellers did the history and physical preparation for the doctor (this computer expert was taking blood pressure, pulse rate and jotting down notes for the patients complaints with the help of an interpreter). The missionaries witnessed to and counseled with each patient before they left the clinic.

Dr. L., Meredith, and I began to walk the streets and paths of the village and pray for each person and home. After dark, as we walked, people began to be very curious about our presence. One man came to us and gruffly asked us who we were and what we were doing? I told him, "God has given this group of Americans a love for the Serbian people. We are in your village to conduct a free medical clinic and to pray for you, your families, and your village." He was very surprised and ran back to his house, where people were gathered in the windows and door ways to look at us. He told them what we were doing. Everyone got very excited! They begged us to come into their homes to pray for them and bless their house. The doors of the village opened to receive us. It was a miracle of answered prayer. Later a Bible study was started in the house where we held the clinic.

There is no way to explain the reception and the results of this mission to that Serbian Gypsy village, except it had to be an answer to prayer to an almighty God!

We returned to Nis and continued to work on the design of the clinic. We laid out a floor plan and a list of modifications that would need to be made for it to become a clinic. While we were doing this, Meredith became ill. Dr. L. stayed with her in their apartment and kept the children so she could rest. Dr. L.'s ministry is prayer. She walked the apartment throughout the day as she prayed.

Meredith became so ill with headaches that she was given an MRI on Friday. The scan results showed brain tumors. Their progress indicated the need for immediate surgery. Dr. Furgerson saw the scans immediately after they were produced and said, "The only man I know who can do this kind of surgery successfully is a surgeon at Methodist Hospital in Houston, Texas. It usually takes three months to see him, if he decides to take a new patient. I will call him."

When Dr. Furgerson called Methodist Hospital in Houston, that surgeon, the head of the Neurological Surgery, was on duty and received the call. He told Dr. Furgerson to send him the scan results and he would look into it. The Serbian hospital had no way of electronically transmitting the scan to Houston. Jered Sellers said, "I can do that!"

The surgeon in Houston later said that he had received the scans from Serbia sooner than he could have gotten the results of a scan done in his own hospital. He ordered Meredith to get to him as quickly as possible, that the need for surgery was urgent. She was in his office on Wednesday and had her operation on Monday. Everything in these preceding paragraphs were burdens carried by our prayer team. We stayed on our knees while God performed His miracles!

Meredith was broken hearted about leaving Serbia. Her whole life was focused on winning Serbs to Christ. She knew that after surgery, it might be a long time before she could return. I told her that we have a sovereign God who is never caught by surprise and His heart was focused on Serbia also. We had a prayer meeting in their apartment before she left. I placed a map of Serbia on the floor and placed my hands on it and prayed for God to reach Serbia for His glory. I prayed that He would accept the sacrifice of the Hanna's investment as a down payment on the price it would take to win that country for Him.

Meredith's surgery was successful! It has taken a lot of prayer and therapy for her to heal. She and her husband were able to return to Serbia for two years. The tumors returned and she had another operation. Now she must remain tumor free for three years before they can be reassigned to Serbia. She is currently in her second year.

The Hannas have been given a ministry in San Antonio, Texas, the city where Dr. James Furgerson lives. It is a creative ministry reaching people that are unreachable by the average Baptist church. He is establishing house churches and Bible fellowship groups. Meredith is teaching English at the International Language Center.

There ministry continues and the story continues.

The Bannerts became the leaders in reaching Serbia. Karl set up a prayer network of people committed to pray for Serbia. He knew about my "junk for Jesus" program and about the mobile clinics that I had built. He called me asking for hospital equipment. I told him I would pray about it. After a few days of prayer, I received a call from Dr. K.P. Walker, in Tyler, Texas. He was the man who had helped me in building the first mobile clinic in 1967. He told me that the Doctor's Hospital in Tyler had closed and they were looking for a non-profit organization to which they could donate the contents. They had just closed the doors leaving all the equipment and all the supplies in the building. Our group Amigos Internacionales was ready to help.

My wife and I had just been part of a new church start in Corsicana, Texas. The Cornerstone Baptist Church was meeting in a rented building. I challenged the church to take part in this Serbian Mission project. They accepted and were joined by other volunteers from First Baptist Church, Crockett, Texas. It took two 40 foot freight containers to hold all of the equipment and supplies.

The final push to pack it all was done by the Cornerstone Church. Since the missionary did not need furniture and kitchen equipment, all of that was taken to the Cornerstone Baptist Church. It furnished the kitchen and Sunday school classrooms of the church. We prayed for God to bless the Serbs and He gave us a blessing as well!

The new focus of ministry in Serbia was in the city and area around Cacak (pronounced Chachak). The Bannerts could not get permission from the local authorities to establish a work in that area. He asked them if he made a donation of equipment to the local hospital if they would change their minds. They said they would consider it.

Karl was driving to the hospital, after we had shipped the containers, and noticed two container trucks in front of him. They turned into the hospital parking lot as he did. He discovered they were the containers we sent him. The doors to Cacak were opened. Praise the Lord!

Conclusion:

Many who read these pages will have been, or are, or will be involved in disaster relief, refugee camps, and humanitarian aid of all types. I feel it is important to share my regimen of debriefing and decompression with you.

The first day of my return home is a day of loving, laughing and rejoicing with my family. When I come through the door for the first time, the kids know not to get between me and Dr. L. or they may get hurt! Then, it's hug and kiss the kid's time.

The second day is a day of family business, pay bills, write business letters, do travel accounts, catch up on the needs of the farm, make a "do list". I close that day with a feast at my favorite restaurant for family and friends. It's a time to share the story.

The third day is a day of weeping, fasting, and prayer. I open my journal and begin to lay before the Lord everything I had noted, but could not help. I unload everything on Him

He can handle it. When I close my journal, I become aware of how warm His embrace is when I am weeping on His chest.

The fourth day is a day of laughter! Everything is humorous. Laughter rings through my home! I am conscious of His joy and approval of my work. It is a day filled with fun and happiness. I observe the spiritual discipline of celebration!

My wife, Dr. L., and I have been involved in disaster relief and other humanitarian aid projects since 1967. Over 43 years of this activity and our lives are still filled with the joy of the Lord and a powerful love of each other. We have not experienced any post stress syndrome because of putting the burdens on the Lord and walking with Him in prayer throughout each day.

There is one exception. The chemo-hormone injection I get every six months for my prostate cancer has depression as one of the side effects. When a feeling of melancholy and a desire to shed tears come, I major on the good stuff. I remember my life, my ministry, my family, my joy in the Lord and I tell Satan I have no reason to be sad. Take this depression and go to Hell with it.

I still have 35 more events to share, perhaps another book at a later date.