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# Challenger

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LIKE A LOVING MOTHER,  
GOD WATCHED OVER OUR FAMILY  
DURING COVID-19



/ Run! Fire! Run!  
/ A Deserter's Long Way Home  
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# LIKE A LOVING MOTHER, GOD WATCHED OVER OUR FAMILY DURING COVID-19

by Frances Chow

*How could a mother not be heavy-hearted when COVID-19 struck her family? I am that mother. During the pandemic, our oldest son was diagnosed with having COVID-19. Our other son worked as an infectious disease physician. And our youngest child, our daughter, was living alone in downtown New York City, the first epicenter of the pandemic!*



## Unexpected Calamity

After my husband, Leon Chow, retired from the pastorate, we moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, upon the suggestion of our son Clement and his wife Candace. This move proved to be mutually beneficial, and we found our retirement life very relaxing. Our son and daughter-in-law had attained success in their careers, for which we were very thankful, and we got to enjoy two energetic and lovely grandchildren, taking care of them when their school day was over.

Suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, we learned on March 14, 2020, that Clement had contracted COVID-19. Clement is an assistant professor of human genetics at the University of Utah Medical School. In late February and early March, he traveled out of state to give lectures at several institutions. Soon afterwards, he became sick with a fever. Later, he found blood in his phlegm and experienced shortness of breath. On March 12, he measured his blood oxygen level at home and found it was down to 70%. Realizing his life was in danger, he paid a visit to the university's hospital and was immediately transferred to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), where he spent six days and nights. The hospital supplied him with high-flow oxygen to aid his breathing. When his condition improved, he was discharged but continued to have a persistent cough accompanied by

shortness of breath and a lack of energy. He remained on oxygen for more than two weeks. According to Clement, the most painful aspect was not the extreme physical discomfort he experienced, but the loneliness he endured while separated from his family and the fear of death he faced alone in quarantine.

After Clement was diagnosed with COVID-19, my husband and I had to be quarantined. Even when our quarantine was over, we could not enter Clement's house to visit with him and his family. All we could do was to leave on their front porch the snacks I prepared for them and soups for Clement, made from traditional Chinese dietary therapy. We could only speak with Candace and our grandchildren through the glass front door. Yet there were times when we could not find words to comfort one another, so we just stood there lost in sadness. Though we were close physically, we felt we were worlds apart!

This house, where we had previously spent much pleasurable and memorable time together as an affectionate family, now seemed like a prison. COVID-19 was like a shackle, binding my beloved children and grandchildren inside their house. It was not until the family's quarantine was over and Clement could breathe on his own, that we, three generations, could talk in their front yard while still maintaining a

distance of six feet apart. Clement often warned us not to get close because his family carried the virus, and my husband and I, advanced in age, had weak immune systems. Still, it was so difficult to refrain ourselves from playing with our grandchildren and hugging our son, who seemed to have been brought back to life from a near-death experience.

### Enduring Isolation, Helplessness, and Anguish

After Clement tested positive for COVID-19, we began to question whether our daughter-in-law, our grandchildren, and even we ourselves had contracted the virus and become carriers. Prior to Clement's hospitalization, we had been carrying out our regular routines—working, going to school, and serving in our church. However, the staff from Utah's Department of Health refused to administer the COVID-19 test to us, and they also did not recommend that we share with those whom we

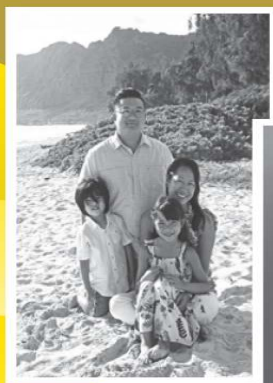
had been in contact with that we might have been exposed to the virus. Because of that, we did not even dare to ask other Christians to pray for us. We were enveloped by a profound sense of guilt and isolation.

During that time, we had additional worries. We experienced much anguish and feelings of helplessness as we thought of our second son, Jeremy, and his family who lived in Texas, as well as our daughter, Melanie, who lived alone in New York City. Jeremy is a physician in infectious diseases and works as an assistant professor at Southwestern Texas University Medical School. With COVID-19 raging everywhere, I was deeply worried that Jeremy—being young and with expertise in this field—would be recruited to work on the frontline. Since most of the hospitals were lacking protective equipment and sanitizing products, doctors could easily contract coronavirus. And Jeremy could bring the virus home and infect his about-

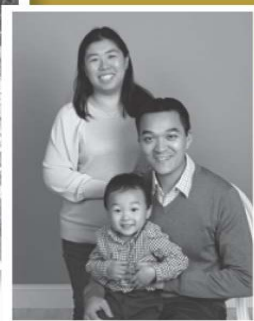


*Leon, Melanie, & Frances*





*Clement, Candace,  
Emery, & Micah*



*Jeremy, Jennifer, & Ethan*

to-give birth wife and their three-year-old son.

Fortunately, Melanie was able to work from home. If she stuck to all the preventive measures, even living in New York City, the chance of her being infected would be greatly minimized. Even so, as her mother, I still felt anxious for her—fearing that she might not be able to buy food, sanitizing products, and face masks. I often wondered how she managed to face the loneliness of complete isolation by herself.

### **Help in the Storm**

If God's Word has not been hidden in my heart, I believe I would have suffered a mental breakdown during this time. Because of this pandemic, I came to face squarely my inability to keep my children safe. No

matter how deep my maternal love and sorrow were—and how many sacrifices I was willing to suffer—my human expressions and efforts would be insignificant. I shed many tears of concern for my three children, but deep in my heart, I knew that God is our only *“refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble”* (Psalm 46:1).

God's Word gave me comfort and hope and wiped away my tears. It reminded me that when I am downcast, I should praise the Lord and put my hope in Him—because He is my salvation (Psalm 42:5). Moreover, I should *“rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus”* (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). I can firmly believe that God—with His infinite wisdom and power—is in control, and His grace is

sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9). When we are confronted by difficult circumstances, He will provide us with a way out so that we can endure them (1 Corinthians 10:13).

I give thanks to God because His Word reminds me that—though we will encounter many troubles in this world—we can experience peace when we are in Him. We can be of good cheer because Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33). When COVID-19 is rampant, plaguing the world, as well as my family, my heart does not have to be troubled. I do not have to be afraid because Jesus has promised to give me peace (John 14:27). He is my God, and He is with me (Isaiah 41:10).

God promises to cover us with His feathers and deliver us from pestilences/epidemics (Psalm 91:3, 4). I believe this is what happened to Clement. Though he had to use high-flow oxygen when he was in the ICU, and doctors considered intubation and using a mechanical ventilator, they never had to use the latter options on him. His oxygen level was able to rise steadily while using less invasive therapy. Some patients who are intubated and put on ventilators go into a deep coma and sometimes encounter death. Truly, Clement went through the valley of death unscathed, for the Lord was with him (Psalm 23:4a).

As we look back, we realize God's timing is the best, and His grace is always sufficient for us, for His power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Being the first COVID-19 patient in Salt Lake City admitted into the ICU, Clement had many advantages. At that time, there was ample protective gear and equipment for medical personnel, and no lack of medications and other resources for patients. Also important was that the medical staff had not yet been overworked, so they had adequate time and energy to take care of Clement, their first ICU patient with COVID-19.

This experience opened our eyes to the frailty of life. We can identify with the verse that says, *"Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall"* (Isaiah 40:30). Clement was a strong 38-year-old geneticist specializing in rare childhood diseases, yet he was not spared the attack of COVID-19. Insignificant human beings should not boast of youthfulness, health, or education. We must humble ourselves and *"hope in the Lord"* (Isaiah 40:31a) because He is *"the Creator of the ends of the earth... and his understanding no one can fathom"* (Isaiah 40:28). We pray that God will enable Clement to *"soar on wings like eagles"* and he *"will run and not grow weary and will walk and not be faint"* (Isaiah 40:31b).

It surely was God's providential care that Clement's wife and two children, as well as my husband and I—all who had been in constant contact with Clement—did not contract the virus. We praise the Lord, too, that He providentially spared our younger son, Jeremy, from being dispatched to the frontline treating COVID-19 patients. It seemed to be a precautionary measure taken by the hospital, because if Jeremy contracted the coronavirus, he could endanger the life of his wife, the baby in her womb, and their three-year-old son. We thank God that in all things, He works for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28a).

During this time, many church members demonstrated their love for our family through comforting words and prayers. Some even did grocery shopping for us. We are grateful that a loving Christian sister—whom we had never met—generously donated non-medical masks to Melanie and medical masks to Jeremy. So they both had a good supply of protective masks to use. We appreciated the sweet love poured onto us by the family of God.

And we are thankful that we have advanced technology! Via the internet, our family could see, talk, and pray for one another. Even Micah, our four-year-old grandson, knew he could pray to God and ask God to protect his dad from contracting COVID-19 again.

### **Like a Mother, Our Great Shepherd Loves Us**

During this pandemic, God graciously reminded me through His Word that He is not only our loving Heavenly Father but also like a loving mother. As I meditate upon those Bible verses that describe God as a loving mother, many sweet memories came to my mind.

I still remember how serene my children were resting against my breast enjoying the pleasure of being nursed by me. At that moment, my children knew they were being lovingly cared for. Our hearts were joined in perfect harmony, and we experienced no separation from each other. The prophet Isaiah likened God's care for us to a mother who tenderly feeds and cares for her





children. Like a mother, He has compassion for us, and He will never forget us (Isaiah 49:15). God is also like a good shepherd who not only gathers his lambs—His children—in His arms, He carries them in His bosom. And He gently leads us who are tending the young (Isaiah 40:11).

Thank God that His tender loving care for us continues throughout our life! He said: “... *I have upheld (you) since your birth, and have carried since you were born. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you*” (Isaiah 46:3b–4).

We are truly blessed! What do we have to be afraid of when God is like a loving mother and a good shepherd caring for us, protecting us throughout our lives? When my children were young, I often sang the hymn, “God Will Take Care of You,” with them. The chorus is not only melodic but easy to be understood and remembered by very young children. When COVID-19 attacked my family, the melody and the lyrics of this hymn: “God will take care of you, through every day, o’ver all the way; He will take care of you, God will take care of you” lingered in my head, assuring me of God’s care. This brought me great consolation!

My little lambs have grown up now, and I pray that their spiritual life has

matured through this storm. I pray they will not forget that our Heavenly Father is watching over them “through every day, o’ver all the way.” God has reminded me that the next time I am with my grandchildren, I need to teach them to sing the chorus, “God Will Take Care of You.” The heart of young children is like good soil. The refreshing rain and bright sunshine of God’s Word will nourish their spiritual life and cause it to grow. As a mother and grandmother, I can help weed, fertilize, and irrigate that life to withstand the raging storms of life, so that tiny seeds of faith will mature into a vibrant flourishing tree, towering into the sky. ■

#### Editor’s note:

As of the date of this publication, the world has experienced 37.1 million COVID-19 cases and 1.01 million deaths. We at *Challenger* express our deep condolences and sincere sympathy to all who have been impacted by this terrible plague. May our Heavenly Father’s love and mercies be felt by all.



*Frances Chow is a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, a minister’s wife, and a retired school*

*psychologist and supervisor. Her story was translated by Philip Yu, an elderly believer who attends Rutgers Community Christian Church in New Jersey.*





# RUN! Fire! RUN!

by Sharon Santucci

## The Fire Incident

The weekend of October 26–27, 2019 was beautiful—except for the wind! On Saturday, my husband Dan and I had enjoyed walking around downtown Commons with my cousin, her husband, and a good friend who had driven from San Francisco to visit us in Sacramento. On Sunday, Dan and I went to our church in Midtown with plans to meet up with the group for lunch at a restaurant near our house.

By Saturday night, the wind had begun to pick up, and it was forecast that gusty winds would be around for Sunday. People in California know about the dangers of wildfires caused by high winds! We had seen the news over the last few days of the Kincadee fire in Sonoma County in Northern California. And the 2018 Paradise fire in Butte County was still in the back of our minds. But the danger of a wildfire near our home seemed remote as we are not in any foothill or mountain area.



*Running from fire (credit Gerald Contreras)*



*Author's Honda CRV*

As we drove toward the restaurant after church on Sunday, we saw black smoke in the distance. It seemed to be coming from the area where our house was located, so Dan and I decided rather than taking Highway 80 towards the restaurant, we would continue on Highway 5, to check that everything was okay at home. But, one mile away, we were stopped by traffic. At that point we were just annoyed by having to wait in traffic.

But our annoyance soon turned into fear! Dan was driving, and we were in the fourth lane, next to the right shoulder. Soon a fire engine drove by on the shoulder, then an emergency vehicle and highway patrol. Cars were lined up on the exit corridor on Arena Boulevard—and they were not moving. We started to see ashes flying in the air and smoke coming our way. There were no firemen or police to direct us what to do.

We presumed the fire was near us, and we started to feel anxious. I

called my cousin to let her know that we were stuck in traffic and would be late for lunch. We video called our younger son Adam, who lives near us, and told him what was happening. He had worked for the police department before, and we thought he could advise us in this situation. As more ashes came closer, Dan started to repeatedly say that we were going to die. Then my imagination went wild, thinking that all the cars trapped on the freeway were going to burst into flames! We wanted to get out of the car and escape the fire, but we didn't see other people doing that. Adam advised us *not* to get out of the car. He called his older brother, Evan, who was in Japan and sleeping, and Evan sent a link to an official website which told what to do if you are caught driving in a wildfire. It said, "Stay in your car!"

Forty-five minutes from the time we first stopped on the freeway, the ashes and smoke were getting thicker

around us. Dan was contemplating climbing the wire fence on the side of the freeway, next to the shoulder, when we saw in our back mirror that some cars were driving through an opening someone had cut in the wire fence. We decided to turn the car around on the shoulder and get in line to exit through the fence which opened onto a huge dirt field leading to a housing development across from it.

As we were waiting to get through the fence opening, our fear became more intense. Fire was coming closer and closer toward us. Looking over my right shoulder—we were now facing south and the fire was coming from the north—I saw flames sweeping down the bushes in the median and on the other side of the freeway with embers blowing over cars, big-rig trucks, and freeway signs. The wind was gusting, and flames were shooting up high in the air as the vegetation in the median caught fire.

Dan started to get hysterical, screaming that we were going to die. I felt death very real and close. We

were both screaming and praying, thinking we were going to perish in the fire. Having called our son earlier, we had stayed on the phone with him. Poor Adam was on the phone the whole time, witnessing his parents suffering this horror. I told Adam that if we didn't make it, to tell everyone we loved them. My body physically reacted to fear—my limbs became weak, and my mouth was so dry I could hardly swallow.

We were two cars away from the fence opening—actually more cars were waiting in the other direction—when we saw flames coming down on the driver's side, since we had turned around on the freeway. The fire was about 20–30 feet away. At that point, we decided we needed to get out of the car to escape the fire. (Dan later told me that three times, amidst his hysteria, he had a calm and clear thought in his head telling him to get out of the car.)

We got out of the car and began running on foot. Through the fence opening, squeezing by a vehicle, we ran as fast as we could down a ravine and through the dirt field.



After I could no longer run on the uneven dirt field, Dan dragged me a few steps, when along came a car whose driver told us to get in. This good Samaritan also stopped to pick up a young lady who was running behind us and then drove us to the restaurant where my cousins and friend were anxiously waiting for us. We invited the young woman to join us so that afterwards we could help her find her family. She had lost her cell phone while running from the fire.

When I walked into the restaurant and saw my cousins and good friend, I burst into tears uncontrollably. I realized in that moment that life is so precious! You never know what the next moment may bring.

### Reflections

Dan and I can say for sure that God was with us the day of the fire. We believe that God is always with us—though it was so much more apparent during the fire incident. With certainty, the thought in Dan's head telling him to get out of the car was from God. The messages

were clear and calming amidst the extremely fearful emotions he was experiencing. If we had stayed in our car, we would have been injured or even died. Our car was one of three vehicles that got burned completely. The car of the young woman who ran behind us was also burned completely. Dan and I thank God for saving us and all the people involved in that freeway fire. God was so gracious. No one was injured or died!

Even though Dan and I made several wrong decisions during this incident, God was merciful and saved us from harm. We made the wrong choices by continuing on Highway 5 instead of connecting to Highway 80 and by turning around onto the shoulder on the freeway. (The three cars that were burned completely were on the shoulder and probably burned due to the grass growing there.) God also spared our sons, Adam and Evan, the tremendous guilt they would have felt had we stayed in the car and gotten injured or worse.

After the fire incident, now the COVID-19 pandemic has brought





*October 27, 2019, after the fire - Sharon (middle), cousin Elisa (right) and Kitty*



*October 27, 2019, after the fire - Dan (right) and Pierre (cousin Elisa's husband)*

fear again—a fear that lingers with the possibility of death. Death is a sure thing for all of us in this world—whether from a fire, a deadly virus, or something else. Though death is with us because of sin, those who believe in Jesus have great hope. Jesus won the victory over death. God sent His Son, Jesus, to this earth to die on the cross for our sin. And through His death and resurrection, we can be reconciled to God and receive eternal life.

Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die”* (John 11:25–26).

When we were facing death in the fire, we prayed for the people around us on the freeway. Since that experience, I have been led to pray more fervently for all who do

not know Jesus as Savior. Oh, that they would receive Him, so that—whether in death or life—they would enjoy eternal life. Amen! ■

#### **Footnote:**

The Highway 5 fire in Natomas, that we were caught in, was one of many wildfires that happened on October 27, 2019, in California, due to extreme windy conditions. It started on a dirt mound by a hotel near Del Paso Boulevard next to the freeway and spread south to the Arena Boulevard freeway exit corridor, down the median and shoulders on both sides of the freeway. The fire was only cut off at the connection to Highway 80 by a large cement structure at the interchange, where there was not much vegetation.

*Dan and Sharon Santucci live in Sacramento, California, and are members of Trinity Lutheran Church in Midtown.*



# A DESERTER'S LONG WAY HOME

by Bruce Roberts

*At 18 years of age, I was awaiting a court martial on charges of both AWOL and desertion. Life was crashing in on me. Desperate, I was thinking of taking my life. Then I noticed a book lying on the table next to my jail bunk. The message in the little book, *Peace with God* by Billy Graham, came alive to me. For the first time in my life, I realized I was condemned by God and in need of a Savior.*

## **At Home with Abuse**

In 1960, I was born in Jackson, Michigan, into an average American family. My dad worked at various factory jobs, and my two brothers and I never went to bed hungry. But when Dad drank, he would have violent outbursts of temper and beat my mother and us boys as well. Once, my brothers and I were kept home from school for several days

so that school authorities wouldn't see our bruised bodies. I still have a lump on my lower lip from the time Dad punched me in the mouth with his fist wrapped around a beer can. When I was 15, my parents finally divorced after my dad threatened to kill us all with a shotgun. He ended up in jail. After his release, he headed for Florida, leaving my mother to support us on her own. We boys earned money helping area farmers, and my grandparents helped out financially when they could.

## A Teenage Airman

At age 17, I was rebellious, using alcohol (ironic, after seeing what alcohol did to my dad!) and dabbling in the occult. I quit school, took a GED test, and joined the Air Force, thinking I would finally be "somebody." But I quickly got entangled with the wrong crowd, my troubles mounted, and I considered taking my life. Stationed in North Dakota, I was put in a mental health ward and went AWOL several times. I was classified as a deserter.

With two undesirable friends from my school days, I began burglarizing homes. But our crime spree didn't last long. I soon found myself in jail with several felony charges and the possibility of doing prison time. Bonding out of jail was impossible, as military officials had learned of my whereabouts and placed a hold on me. I spent nearly a year in the

Jackson County jail, a very fearful and humbling experience.

Finally, I was sentenced to a lengthy probationary period and ordered to pay restitution and court costs. The Security Police (SPs) from a nearby Air Force base transported me to North Dakota for the court-martial trial. Fortunately, my court-appointed military lawyer pled my case, and I miraculously avoided a court-martial. I was discharged from the Air Force with a "less than honorable" discharge.

## On the Run as a Civilian

Back home in Michigan, I reported to a probation officer and made monthly payments to the court whenever I could. Then, in trouble again, I foolishly fled the state, violating the conditions of my probation. I ended up in Seymour, Indiana, where I worked for four months at a canning factory before I thumbed my way south to Florida.

Finding my dad was a miracle! It had been years, and we hardly recognized each other. After the divorce, Dad was emotionally and financially devastated and had moved to Florida with little more than the clothes on his back. He landed a job as a fernery worker and lived in a small one-bedroom trailer in a field. I stayed with him about three months, helping him in the fernery, and we picked oranges together.

Once a week, Dad and I hitchhiked 13 miles into Deland, Florida, for supplies. One particular day, a fellow in an old Southern Bell truck stopped to offer us ride. We climbed in and immediately the man popped a question I had never heard anyone ask before: "If you died today, do you know for sure that you would go to Heaven?" He went on to explain God's simple plan of salvation. Dad later said to me: "I hope you don't believe any of that religious stuff!" Actually, I was hoping to talk to the man again. My mind drifted back to the little paperback book I had read in the jail cell in North Dakota.

### Angel of Mercy

I left my Dad's place and returned to Indiana for six months before trouble there made me decide to return to Florida. I set out for the interstate, hitchhiking, but couldn't get a ride going south. As darkness fell, I became discouraged and sat down on the side of the highway with my suitcase in one hand and my guitar in the other. I was cold, lonely, and scared. Feeling completely at the end of myself, my thoughts turned to God. I really didn't know Him, but I decided to pray anyway.

Suddenly, I felt impressed to cross over the median to the interstate's northbound lanes. I had my heart set on Florida, but I gave in and crossed over to the northbound lanes of I-75. Before I even had a chance to put my

thumb up, a late-model automobile bearing a Michigan license plate pulled up next to me. The man inside asked, "You need a ride, don't you?" Whether he was a man or an angel, I believe God sent him. In minutes, I was asleep in the back seat of this mysterious car, going home to Michigan!

Just after daybreak, the man tapped me on the shoulder, and said, "This is where you get out." He handed me a twenty-dollar bill and told me to find something to eat. With that, he pulled away and was gone. I scurried up under the overpass, opened my bag, and put on as many shirts as I could. It was freezing cold. I walked a short distance to a truck stop, ate some breakfast then called the local Greyhound Bus Station. The price of the bus ticket to Jackson was exactly the amount of money I had left over from breakfast—to the penny!

### Moment of Decision

Walking up the driveway to my mother's house, I was surprised to see both of my brothers and two of their friends loading up the car. Someone hollered, "Hey, Bruce, you're just in time! We're going to Florida!" In no time, we were on our way. Arriving in Deland, Florida, we noticed a sign advertising a furnished upstairs apartment. We liked it, rented it, and moved our things in.

Later that evening, I saw the old



Southern Bell work truck that had picked up my dad and me pull into the driveway! The man remembered me! I was surprised to find out that he, his wife, and their two small children lived right next door to us, and that we actually rented the apartment from his parents, who lived on the other side of us! What were the odds of such a precise move—right next to the man whom I so much wanted to meet again? God's hand in all this was amazing!

This man, Don Shaw, invited me to church, and it wasn't long before he and the pastor stopped by for a visit. They had come to speak with us concerning our souls. We heard a crystal-clear presentation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. My brother Dave and I got down on our knees to pray and ask the Lord to save us. My life changed that night. I didn't understand it all, but I knew

that I was born again! God had planted the seed of faith in that jail cell in North Dakota and had led me to where I was this day. What a God! What a Savior!

My dad was indifferent about my becoming a Christian. Once, while walking together down the street, we came upon a dead animal that lay rotting. He said, "That's what happens to you when you die—the maggots eat you! There's no Heaven, and there's no Hell." I was very sad to hear my dad speak these words. I wanted him to be saved too and have a home in Heaven one day.

Not long afterwards, two officers from the Deland police department approached the construction site where I was working. One of them asked if I could identify a wallet. Recognizing it at once, I affirmed that it was my dad's. They told me



*Bruce & his wife Jeri*



*Five of Bruce's six children*



*Bruce's three youngest children*

that he had been killed in an accident the night before. I was stunned! I thought of the conversation I just had with him only days before! *Every person reading this should think of their own soul! Where would you go right now if you were to drop dead? Where would you spend eternity? It's a sobering thought! You must trust Jesus today. No one is guaranteed tomorrow.*

### A Wife, A Baby, and More Trouble

In 1980, I got married, and my wife and I became the proud parents of a beautiful baby girl. We moved to Traverse City, Michigan, where I began working at a small, family-owned restaurant. Always fearful of being picked up on the warrant, one day the inevitable happened. While at work, I received a frantic phone call from my wife. Sheriff's deputies had arrived at our home with a warrant for my arrest and were on their way to the restaurant where I worked. I found myself fighting the urge to run. When the deputies arrived, however, I cooperated fully. They read me my rights, cuffed me, and took me downtown. The scenario seemed all too familiar. But now I had a wife and a baby daughter!

Detectives arrived to transport me back to Jackson to face charges of violation of probation. When I was

escorted to the courthouse, I told the judge that I was truly sorry I had left the state and violated my probation. I told him that I had been saved and now had a wife and daughter. To my surprise, the judge wished me well in my new life as a Christian husband and father. But before I left the courtroom, he sternly warned me that I had better not appear in his courtroom again. If I ever did, he assured me that I would be sent to prison to serve time on the original felony charges.

Back home with my family in Traverse City, Michigan, I went back to work for the same restaurant. Everything was going well until a state HRS investigator showed up at our home! I was at work at the time, and my wife had to handle them alone. Evidently someone had a suspicion that some form of abuse was going on with our infant daughter! My wife refused them entrance into our home. They promised to return the following day with a counselor from the state to do whatever they deemed necessary. Their tactics seemed Gestapo-like. The whole thing was bizarre. Why this? Why now?

### On the Run Again

We had a decision to make. We could either pack up and flee to Florida or face the state. I was literally ripped in two—afraid to lose our daughter

to the state for whatever reasons, and afraid to leave the state again, violating my probation and the judge's orders. I knew the next time I would go to prison. My instincts to flee were overpowering, motivated by fear. We left hurriedly for Florida.

We rented a small apartment in the same area as before. No one knew the situation we had left behind in Michigan. We began attending church, made some Christian friends, and were excited about serving God. But I was tormented inside—weary from running and fearing going to prison. Then, one day, I felt led to tell my friend, Pastor Bob Neale, about my situation. Instead of criticizing me, he showed great concern and told me I needed to get this cleared up once and for all. He explained that I could not have liberty in serving God with this dark cloud over me—and that once this thing was settled, I would be able to serve God unhindered.

### **Fully Surrendered**

For the next three days, I was so convicted that I did not eat or sleep. I finally decided I could face whatever I had coming to me, by the grace of God. The peace of God flooded my soul, and I knew that I had made the right decision. I truly surrendered all.

Pastor Neale and I drove to Michigan, praying and singing all the way. When we pulled into my mother's

driveway, close to midnight, the lights were on. She nearly fainted from the shock of seeing me. She told us that she was usually in bed at this time but for some unknown reason had decided to stay up and bake some homemade bread. So, here we were in my mother's kitchen eating hot bread from the oven!

After prayer and Bible reading the next morning, Pastor Neale and I headed for the courthouse. My probation officer recognized me, and the two of them disappeared into an inner office for what seemed like forever, while I sat nervously in the outer office. I was released into Pastor Neale's custody until we could see the judge, who was out of town.

While we waited, believing God would somehow intervene, Pastor Neale spoke with my mother concerning her salvation. Raised with a Christian Science background, she didn't feel she needed to make any hasty decisions concerning church and God. On Wednesday night, we headed out to church, when my brother Brad, who still lived with my mother, asked if he could come along. In my eyes, my brother, a long-haired biker type who smoked marijuana, was the least likely candidate for becoming a Christian. But God used the message that night to touch Brad's heart. During the invitation, he went to the altar and got saved! Brad served as a missionary in France until his death from cancer in 2013.



## The Great Deliverance

The probation office decided not to wait for the judge. I was told to come down, fill out some papers, and then I would be free to leave for Florida. Grateful that through this whole mess my brother Brad had gotten saved, I was concerned that my mother had not trusted Christ as her personal Savior. A few days later, my mother called Pastor Neale to say that she had been in much turmoil of soul since we had left, unable to eat or sleep. She wanted to know if she could be saved “over the telephone.” She prayed and trusted Christ as her Savior!

And God has done so many more wonderful things in my life since those landmark early days when He delivered me! ■



*Bruce Roberts lives in Tallahassee, Florida, with his wife Jeri and five of their six children. They attend Calvary Baptist*

*Church of Monticello, where Bruce occasionally plays his guitar and sings special music. He enjoys ministering through music and the Word of God in local nursing homes and jails. Bruce also recently enrolled in Hope Bible Institute to further satisfy his insatiable desire to learn God's Word.*

(Continued from back cover)

anyone who would listen to her! She made it clear that she was not afraid to die because she believed in Jesus Christ and the credible evidence of His resurrection. She knew that her death would mean she would be with the Lord she loved.


On one occasion, as she aggressively witnessed in the hospital, I was a bit embarrassed. Seeing this, after her audience left, she turned to me and asked, “Well, what do you think they will do to me—kick me out?” So, we both just laughed, and I knew she would not let up.

One time, when Barbara was waiting for a treatment, a nurse came in to tell her that she also believed in Jesus and hoped she would go to heaven when her time came. Barbara bristled and said, “What do you mean ‘hope you will go to heaven’? There is no maybe about this! We have the promises of Jesus! If you believe in Jesus, there is no ‘if’ or ‘hope so’—it’s a sure thing!” Tears filled the nurse’s eyes. About that time, another nurse came in to check on something with Barbara, and I moved over to the window. The nurse who believed followed me to the window. Touching my arm she said, “What your wife just said about assurance of heaven really blessed me!”

When Barbara was at home and still able to get around a bit, all the grandchildren (16 of them, except two of the girls) came for a visit.



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Barbara went into her bedroom and instructed us to send each grandchild in one by one. She told them not to feel sorry for her because she *knew* she was going to a better place, to be with the Lord in His Heaven. Then she prayed for each one.

The granddaughter who had not been able to come with the group because she was having our first great-grandchild came later, along with the other granddaughter who had not been there, and they brought the new baby for Barbara to hold. She just glowed with pride and satisfaction, grateful that she had lived to enjoy that moment.

On October 8, 2012, Barbara went to be with the Lord. She had a peaceful passing in her sleep and did not suffer—for which I was very thankful!

1. Write check payable to "CCM Canada" and mail it to 4533 Kingsborough Street, Burnaby, BC, V5H 4V3
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*Ernie and Barbara*



*Barbara holding  
her first great-  
granddaughter*

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Did Barbara have a premonition about her death? If so, it was a blessing for me. Several months before she was diagnosed, we were out driving one day and Barbara said, "We aren't likely to both die at the same time." Then she suggested that I teach her how to put water in the furnace and do other jobs that were exclusively mine to do. And she would teach me some things about cooking and housekeeping that she usually did.

At that time, every Thursday, Barbara went to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) to teach conversational English to the spouses of international students. She also taught a Bible class right after her English class. She really loved the internationals, and they loved her, but after the long sessions, she would come home tired. So, we decided Thursdays would be my day to prepare dinner. She would tell me what to fix and how to do it, and that helped me learn enough then to survive later when she was no longer there to guide me.

Barbara and I had been married 54 years, and when she died, I lost someone close and dear to me. I miss her very much, but I'm grateful for the legacy of faith we built in our children—two sons, one daughter, 16 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren (with two more expected soon). They range in age from a few months to eight years old,



and it's a challenge to keep up with them all. Our son, Bradley, lives in Germany and serves with Coalition for Biblical Counseling, training pastors and laity in the principles of good biblical counseling. Our second son, Eric, is an engineer with National Grid and a faithful layperson in his church. And our daughter, JoyLynn, is also very involved in her church and lives nearby, so I get to see her often—although not as often since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thinking of Barbara, as I do so often, I can't help but smile with happiness. I know she's with the Lord she loves and is enjoying her heavenly home.

*"But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man, The things which God has prepared for those who love Him'" (1 Corinthians 2:9, NKJV). ■*



*After returning from 12 years in collegiate ministry in Indonesia, Ernie Beevers served as a pastor for 14 years*

*and for 21 years as director of the New England off-campus center of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in New England. Now fully retired from adjunct teaching and mentoring students, Ernie still helps students (especially ESL students) who ask for his editorial help with their papers.*

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# *Ready for Heaven*

by Ernie Beevers

Did she have some sort of premonition? My wife Barbara had been following CaringBridge postings by two of our friends who were dying of cancer. She prayed faithfully for them, always reading the latest posts to me, making sure I was praying too. Shortly after our two friends died, Barbara was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia. As soon as she heard the doctor's pronouncement, she said, "Now it's my turn!" She was not surprised when we learned that the prognosis for this type of cancer for someone her age was not good.

Barbara felt the Lord had allowed her to have this disease, and she saw it as an opportunity to witness for Christ as she faced death. And witness she did—to every doctor, nurse, and



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