

Every Moment Holds A Gift

Accept it!

Every day we have a Moment of opportunity to walk through the door of Faith and to Believe God for something wonderful in our situation, whatever it is. An Opportunity to Accept a Gift from Him.

God gave the greatest Gift that first Christmas, a ever since then He has been giving wonderful gifts to us. Sometimes His gifts are not what we expect, but He knows exactly what we need. And He knows when the Moment is right for us to Accepts His Most Special Gifts. We have the opportunities to 1) Accept some thing's, 2) Accept each other, or 3) Accept the His help.

Nine years ago last August, the Lord gave me a very special Gift. It was something I had to accept before I could give it away to somebody else who needed it. It was the Gift of His Comfort when Life Hurts. There are some here who can tell My Story tonight. They stuck with me, they listened, and they loved me when life was hard. I've decided it's because God had given them a gift for me way before my time of receiving had come. And so I have prayed the Lord will give you a Gift tonight from the Gift of Comfort He gave me.

Ezekiel 48 speaks of being poured from vessel to vessel. In bible days, they held the wine for weeks in the jars, and then poured it out, leaving the dregs behind. Sometimes God does that with us. God keeps pouring us out until all our junk is gone, so He can use us. When I was in nursing school, the surgeon only used instruments that had been in the autoclave, purified, so as not to contaminate the patient. We get purified in the furnace of suffering over and over and over again, so He can use us to help the hurting.

When I was six, I began piano. My tender teacher, and her daughter is here tonight. Miss Ethel would tenderly put her hands over mine, and softly tell me a better way to play the hard notes. She would put a metronome on the piano and it kept time for me when I couldn't. I did not like it, and was glad when I did not have

to use it. None of us like to be corrected, do we? But God, as my teacher, He knows the best way to think about everything, and He knows how to teach His ways of Love. All encouragement comes from Him. He is Love. He cares.

My first point is simply that **Life Hurts**. Sometimes we just have to Accept It, and go on. About a year before what I'm going to tell you about happened, we prayed and purchased a white car. Only God knew how important this decision was at the time. Another thing I want you to know about is that Dennie is a Lieutenant w/ the Chattanooga Fire department, and they had a call to Kay Author's Precept Ministries, which was a false alarm. They went and checked everything out, and she asked each of them their wives names and wrote in the front of a book she gave them. In our book, LORD, I WANT TO KNOW YOU, a book about the names of God, and praying to Him, calling those names according to our needs, she wrote, to Dennie and Francine, Love How God brings us together in the storms of life. Love, Kay, August 23, 1999. I began reading and studying that book and it took me until August 23, 2000 to finish it.

The next morning, August 24, 2000, I went to work, and worked all day, and Dennie was working his 24 hour shift at the fire hall. It was a Thursday night, and we went to the Wal-Mart and mall to get some things because Beth was starting college the next day at Chattanooga State. We had gotten a couple of big-gulp half price kiwi-strawberry drinks at sonic on our way home, and I'd just called Dennie to say we were on our way home. The sun was going down, and it was about 8:45 when I pulled up to a light and just as I turned under it, the light turned yellow, and Beth screamed, Mama, Something is coming!

The crash that followed was ear splitting, and then everything seemed to be in slow motion. My car went dead and miraculously rolled to a safe stop, on our side of the road. Our red drink splashed all over us, and we had broken glass somehow in our underwear. Oh, and the worst, all I could hear was Beth unable to stop screaming. I was so afraid to look over at her because it was on her side of the car. When I did look, I was so relieved that she

looked fine, except for the horror on her face, a little bloody place on her forehead, and a bruised forearm.

Her door wouldn't open, so we had to crawl out the door on my side. Beth usually drives, and that night, she was hungry, with a slight headache and did not want to. Looking back, you can also see how huge that is, now. I don't guess there are any coincidences. And all these Moments meant something.

My cell phone was wet from the drink. I screamed for someone to please call 911. I knew Dennie would hear the whole call, and when they gave our fireman's tag, it would be awful for him. I asked them please tell the 911 operator to tell Dennie that we were ok, but send someone quick, the other man was not.

Unbeknownst to me, I started my left turn about the same time Mr. Whitener came from behind a car that was turning in at the filling station. He never his brakes, and hit our car between the doors on Beth's side. His motorcycle impact bent the frame beneath our car he was coming at such speed. He was repelled over our car and landed in the road. I don't even remember where the motorcycle ended up.

I thought how hard this was to Believe, what just happened, and how bad it was. And then I prayed, "Lord, you are going to have to help me! I'm really scared and this is not good, is it?" I felt a dark cloud come over my heart as I realized, I prayed, "*He is not going go be ok, is he?*" The Lord responded, "This is not really your fault. And I'm going to take care of you. See how I already did?"

When we got out of the car, Beth and I stood there and wept together until wailing ambulance arrived. I have to be honest, at the time, I did not want this gift. Not this moment.

Between the TV news people EMT people, and police questioning me between all my answers of "huh? What? And I don't know how it happened,"...I just wanted to rewind the last 15 minutes and have a chance to do it all over again. If I could just have a moment to change it all, I would try with all my heart to fix it. But

as strong as that desire was, I was powerless to fix this. I stood there **staring at the unbelievable moment** that night. **In that Moment, I had an opportunity to go through the open door of Faith and BELIEVE that God would take care of me like He said.** Or I could never Accept His Help.

God was saying **Believe Me!**

When we got home, I was very distraught because my car was not in the carport anymore. Sometimes we don't make all the connections, I guess.

Suddenly, my body decided to release everything in it, so I was in the bathroom for a while. In those days, my bible was lying there and I remember mumbling something to God like, "You're going to have to tell me something. Please speak to me!" My bible opened to **Isaiah 51:12, I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die?**

I remember rubbing my eyes while reading it again. I was trying to comprehend that God just *spoke to me like that* through His Word. I wondered How He could do that. And suddenly I realized He was God, and He knew everything, and was certainly able to talk to me about it. Just that second, the phone rang, and the police at the hospital was calling. Dennie cracked the bathroom door with the phone to his ear and repeated the awful words back to the police for my hearing, "I see, He just died."

My bible was still on my lap. And I started weeping, and saying, "Oh, No! Oh, No! oh, No!" and my tears just fell on that verse. It was now 11:45PM. Dennie started asking me a million questions and calling a bunch of people. I only wanted to tell the man how sorry I was. I felt so guilty because we survived and he didn't. Then I realized close Beth came to losing her own life, at my fault. I was only able to nod, or shake my head. I knew I was in a whole lot of trouble. I prayed the man was saved. And I tried to pray for his family. I could feel their hate for me like needles everywhere. I lay on the bathroom floor like an X unable to speak or pray for my sobs. I tried to calm down but the waves of horror kept pouring

over my soul. Life really can change in a moment. Now what will I do? "OH! LORD, please help me" I muttered under my breath.

I called Mama, and Daddy. I hope I can tell this. Daddy's gone how, but Mama answered from a deep sleep, and when they understood, Daddy, who never talks on the phone, wanted to talk to me. Daddy said, "Francine, listen to me, you are going to have to pull yourself together. You will just make yourself sick if you don't, and Beth needs you now to be strong. Now, listen to me, you calm down and pull yourself together, do you hear me?" I quit crying so hard, and then Daddy said, "Now, everything is going to be OK. It was an accident, and God's going to take care of it, because I'm praying for you. I love you, and you try to get some rest and we will talk in the morning."

Mama took the phone and said the most amazing thing, she said, "I don't know why this happened to you, but maybe it's so you can look someone else in the eye and tell them you know how they feel."

I sat there pondering this. Maybe God had a purpose? This was unbelievable to me. How could he make something good of this moment?

JoAnn said I'm going to pray God give you what you need, because I can't help you, but God can.

Jeff said I don't know what to say, & I'm so sorry. I love you and I'm praying for you.

Our Pastor came; He just let me sob on his shoulder. Nobody knew what to say. Dennie's parents came. I wanted to tell everybody I was so sorry. The long night just stretched out to eternity and we seemed stuck there. When we finally turned out the lights, it seemed I could not close my eyes. When I did, I dreamt we were there again at the red light and I knew what was going to happen and was planning to stop myself from turning. But I always woke up with a start and realized it was too late, that moment had passed. And I was powerless to stop it.

When the sky lightened, I got up and made some coffee and went through the zombie-like motions of getting ready for work, fixing breakfast, and trying to be normal. I was ok, until I raised the blinds to our patio and the sunlight hit me on my face, and I fell to my knees weeping. I began thanking God for another chance to see a sunrise, another chance to eat a meal with my family, another chance to go sit at my computer at work, and another chance to go on living.

I recalled my life before this happened and realized I'd been very superficial, selfish, and uncaring before now. And I promised the Lord if He would please help me get through this, that I'd try to do better. And I wondered IF THIS HAPPENED TO SOMEBODY ELSE, HOW WOULD THEY HANDLE IT?

And this is my 2nd point. **2) I'm no different from you.**

Our stories aren't so different, either. The details of our stories may be different, but we're human, and let me tell you, we're a lot alike. But do you know what? Jesus knows every detail in your story just like He knows mine. And **He is able to Speak a Very special word to you about whatever it is that has broken your heart.** He knows all the characters in your story and mine. And He cares. And at This Very Moment, He wants you to know He Loves You. Yes, you are the one Jesus Loves.

Our family has suffered everything from untimely deaths, to miscarriages. My Grandma Caldwell watched her two sons bury their wives, and helped raise her grandchildren. One we lost to Cancer, and the other to suicide. Grandpa Caldwell had cancer and Parkinson's, and Grandma broke her back and leg, and had cancer, too. She also lost her Mama to cancer. My daddy's family was broken. He was wounded deeply as a little boy. But God took it and used it, Daddy helped the wayward, & encouraged others. He could sympathize with them.

2 Cor. 1:4 Who comforteth **us** in all our tribulation, that **we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.**

Do you recall what My Mama said to me that night? *"Sometimes it's so you can look someone else in the eye and say you know how they feel..."*

There were 3 people the Lord had placed in our church who came to me and the same exact thing happened to them. One man had killed a lady who had three little children. The other two had not seen someone on bicycles. And they'd all been given a gift of comfort for me when I was crying. Suddenly, I realized I was not so different after all. And neither were they. I decided to have a deeper respect for them from now on. And I thanked God for making me not feel so alone. And for the hope that if they could get through it, maybe I could. And they became my confidantes. I could talk to them about it. They understood.

So, the next thing is the officer, who knew Dennie at the City. He called to say he was coming to charge me with the accident. I really didn't know what that meant. We opened the front door, and a police car was parked in our driveway. Somehow we ended up sitting on the rockers on our front porch, talking about a million things until he got around to it. I was surprised when he said, "I am sorry, but I have to do what I came her for. He began to read my charges and my rights to me. All of a sudden, I felt I was going to smother, like the world was squishing me. He called it, "failure to yield right of way." He gave me my ticket, and my court date. Dennie followed him to the car. They talked a long time, both shaking their head. Come to think of it, there were a lot of times, at court and with the lawyers, they talked to Dennie instead of me, like they thought I would not be able to handle the truth of the situation.

We went to traffic court, and the room was filled with people there from everything from indecent exposure, to speeding, running red lights, you name it. And none of those people seemed scared to be there, or embarrassed to hear their name called out loud. I was flabbergasted at their relaxed attitudes. Sometimes they would make us come back. And every time, it was a lawyer bill. We lost count of the expenses. But somehow the Lord provided each one. As he had promised.

The last traffic court was the worst one. But God had four people who were there that night, give their testimony to the police report and explained how I did not see the man coming and why it happened. This began to answer some awful questions I had in my heart, how in the world I could have done such a thing. And these four witnesses are the reason, in that Moment that I was not charged with the worst thing this side of murder- Vehicular Homicide.

I had already been told to plea GUILTY. I didn't want to, but they explained that I *was* guilty. I did turn and something was coming, and I couldn't lie about that. So I did. The next thing I knew, I was charged with FAILURE TO YIELD RIGHT OF WAY in traffic court. And with the rap of the judge's gavel, I was shocked to learn that it carried a 3 month jail sentence. I almost fainted when I heard the judge rap the gavel again and say he was waiving my jail sentence. And I heard him say something about a probation officer, a reckless driving course, and court fines. We paid the fines, and they gave me my appointment to meet my probation officer and go to my course.

I learned this puts 12 points on your license. If I got stopped for anything else, that would mean losing my driving privileges for 2 years. My probation officer was nice enough, but it hurt my heart to have a record. And I was on probation 1 and ½ years. Talk about driving careful. People would pass me and make motions to me on the way to work, because I overdid it, being careful. I just prayed they would make it where ever they were going. Years ago, that was me, zipping around people, putting my makeup on the way to work, and running late everywhere with road rage. I realized what a gift of mercy God had given me all these years. See why I say I'm no different from a lot of you?

During this time, the Whitener family did sue me for "wrongful death." They were suing for a half-a-million dollars. So, our car insurance provided a lawyer for this process and we began to prepare to go to civil court. I had no idea where they thought the money would come from, but I found out quite soon. Pretty much, it means you lose your savings, retirement, home, cars, and will

work for the rest of your lives to pay it to them. They sent us to a bankruptcy lawyer, and he was expensive. And we were 3 years into this thing, and 2 weeks to trial, and it seemed there was nothing but bad news every where we turned.

Dennie had this stack of clothes in our closet, and I'd been asking him to go through them, but I'm glad he didn't. because one day, Dennie was reading about going into your closet and praying about what ever it is, and he did, and he said his elbows rested right on top of those clothes. And he said God spoke to him right there in our closet. And God said, "I give and I take away. And I will take care of you no matter what. And I need you to believe me."

Around the same time, I was praying, too, and God said something to me that I want you to hear. He said, "I may not require you lose everything, Francine, but I need you to Believe me, **that if I do**, that I'll take care of you."

So Dennie told me what to tell our lawyers. I called them and got the answering machine of course. And I said, We have reached a decision, and we know it's 2 weeks to trial, and we have prayed and decided that if God took care of Job, He will take care of us. And even if God does take everything, we will still have our health and have each other, and we will Bless His Name, and Believe He will restore everything that he took."

I hung up, and in about 30 minutes, our lawyer called and said, you will not believe what happened to me today. I was told that I have cancer, and then I get your message about having your health. And I have to say that it made tears come into my eyes, to hear about the kind of Faith that you have. So I want to be clear, that we are going to trial and you stand to lose everything and you understand that, right? I said yes.

But I did tell him that my prayer had been all along, that God settle it out of court, and that God settle it for what our insurance would pay.

You must believe me that it seems **God was waiting on us to surrender our Belief and Trust in Him**, because suddenly the wheels started turning. The next phone call we got was the lawyer saying you are not going to "believe this, but they are *getting ready to settle* for \$50, 000. He said he was going to offer them \$45,000. I said I would pray and thanked him for calling. And within 2 days of our court date, the lawyer called to say everything was settled and **God took care of it, just like He promised.**

The lawyer also said most people are divorced by now, from the stress of the situation, and I must say that Dennie and I have never been closer. Although, you may can relate to this, we had our moments, no pun intended. This brings me back to the point. Every Moment holds a gift. And we must accept it.

And my last point is that 3) **Jesus cares and Jesus can help**, but we must **Accept it**. He will never force himself on us, He is a true gentlemen. He is a man of sorrow, acquainted with grief.

There's an old poem that says;

I walked a mile with Pleasure
and she chattered all the way,
But I was non-the-wiser
for what she had to say.
But I walked a mile with Sorrow,
and not a word said she.
But oh, the things I learned from her,
when Sorrow walked with me.

The night of the settlement, I asked God to give me a verse for that moment, too, and you will be just as surprised as I was, the verse **was Psalm 145:16 Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.**

I was like, ok, but what does this mean? And He said, well, what was your prayer from the start, what did you want with all your heart? And I remembered my prayer and He had DONE EXACTLY THAT, only after He had taught me a few things. Like *how this feels to hurt this bad*. Like how accidents happen and how bad one can *want forgiveness* and learn give that Gift of forgiveness to others, too. Job had to forgive his friends. Joseph had to forgive his brothers. Jesus asked the Father to forgive those who crucified Him. Finally, I was able to forgive the man for hitting me, and his family for what they did, along with God for letting it happen. I also forgave those who didn't know what to say or do, and said the wrong things and hurt me. All is forgiven. I accept it all, and accept everyone else, and accepted God's help. The gift of peace came in that acceptance. Life hurts, sometimes, and we're a lot alike, and God wants to help.

The last thing I want to talk about is that I grew up in church, and when I was six, I came forward with a group in VBS. Someone asked us if we wanted to be saved, and all of us shook our heads, and we all bowed at the altar, and were baptized the next Sunday. And then I faithfully worked hard and played and sang, and worked on bus routes.

But one day, our pastor asked us if we were willing to swing out over hell on a rotten corn stalk, based on our experience for salvation. And the Holy Spirit revealed to my heart that I had never really Believed on the Lord Jesus Christ to save me from my sins and from Hell. I went home and tossed in my sleep that night, and the next morning, in my bathroom, in our trailer behind Daddy's shop, I knelt in the floor and Believed the Lord Jesus to save me, instead of all the works I'd done in my life. My goodness was not good enough and never would be. And do you know what he did? He came into my heart and I am a changed woman. And I don't have to worry anymore because of that day.

Now, I can't let this moment pass without letting you know that you may be like I was. You may have never prayed that prayer, or you prayed it so long ago, that it doesn't even seem real. And you struggle from day to day and long for and desire to know if God

really means what He says in His Word, that He loved the world so much that He gave His only son, that whosoever Believes in Him should not perish, but have ever-lasting life. Or maybe you work so hard every day that you just don't have time to think about God, or even pray or read like you used to. Maybe you're upset about some things, or with him for letting some things happen, or some people get away with some things. And maybe you are in need of a gift of His Help tonight. Well, you are in the right moment. Because as we have said, Each Moment Holds a Gift. And all we have to do is accept it.

I'm going to end with a song, and then a song of prayer. And my prayer is that you would pray and ask God to give you a very special gift tonight. Salvation, or the strength to walk through the door of Faith to Believe God means everything He says.

Jesus Can Help

I believe, Help thou my unbelief.

Walk on through the door, for the Lord will go before you,

Into a greater power you've never known before.

Francine Smith spoken to

Northside Baptist Womens group

Dec 7, 2009.