

Triumph in Hard Places



My life was a mess. My husband, our five little children, and I were living in a two-car garage with no running water or inside plumbing. My husband was an alcoholic. I was so miserable that I cried myself to sleep many times.

Things hadn't started out this way for me. My parents were Christians before I was born. One night, in a church service, while still very young, I felt the Lord speak directly to me. I went to the altar at the end of the meeting and gave my heart to the Lord in simple faith. He saved me, and I felt as if I were walking on clouds.

However, I did not realize it was necessary to pray and read the Bible in order to keep the victory, so I drifted away from the Lord. After that, I was not fit for Heaven because the Lord was not in my heart. But I did not fit in the world either, because I was condemned every time I did something wrong.

When I met my husband, he knew nothing about a born-again experience, although he had attended a nominal church when he was younger. He lived like everyone else, and after we were married, things went along just fine for the first few years. Then my husband developed a drinking habit. As the alcohol addiction fastened on his life, things became worse and worse. Finally he was coming in drunk every night, and we were reduced to living in a garage. Only God knew what turmoil was in my heart.

One afternoon some people from the Apostolic Faith Church came to visit me. As we talked, I told them how much my husband needed God, though I had no thought of turning to God myself. Our youngest boy was sick, and he was lying there on an old couch. The folks from the church asked if I wanted them to pray for him, and I said yes. I knelt while they prayed. Just as my knees touched the floor, the Lord spoke right out of Heaven to my heart, "You need Me more than anything in this world." He got my attention! Right then I surrendered completely to God, and in that moment, He brought peace to my troubled soul.

What a transformation! God didn't take anything good out of my life, just the misery and heartache. While the circumstances around me were the same, my life was completely changed. It was like going from darkness to light. When my husband came home drunk, I had the Lord with me as my comfort and support.

In my heart was a determination to live for the Lord, even if none of my family served Him. God sanctified me and baptized me with the Holy Ghost, and I had more strength to stand for the Lord after that. I began to lean on the Lord for everything, and he worked in my life. Time after time He worked miracles and gave me the strength I needed to perform my daily tasks.

All our water had to be carried from the neighbour's house. To do laundry, I carried water in wash tubs and heated it on the old wood stove in the garage. As I washed the clothes, I prayed, and my tears mixed with the wash water. Our clothesline in the yard was old and often fell down. Then I would have to carry water again to wash the same clothes because they had fallen in the dirt, but the Lord gave me the strength to do it.

One night when my husband came home drunk, our oldest boy hid in a tree. My husband had several guns, and that night, he took one out into the front yard and shot at random up into the air. He was right under the tree where our son was hiding, not knowing the boy was there. God watched over our son and the bullets missed him.

The only way I had to get to church was for my husband to take me. Often he said, "I'll never take you to that church again as long as I live," but I prepared to go as if I knew he would take me. Sometimes just minutes before time to go he would break down and agree. One Sunday he refused, so I started walking. I knew I needed the strength I received from being in church and hearing God's Word. I decided if I did not get there until the night meeting, at least I would get that one. However, a young couple stopped and asked if I wanted a ride. They missed their own church service that morning to take me to my church. God always made a way.

One time someone gave my husband a load of new pine-board skids. I began building a room over the garage. I took the nails out, and the boys helped me carry the boards up the ladder, one by one. Eventually the room was complete enough so that we could take the boys' bunk beds up there. That room became my prayer room; there I read the Bible to the boys and prayed.

God dealt with my husband, and spared his life more than once. One time he and a friend went deer hunting. The other man mistook my husband for a moving deer and shot, and the bullet went right past my husband's head. Another time he came home depressed and stirred arsenic into water and drank it. We had only one door out of the garage, and he would not let me go to get help. Finally, at about two in the morning, I managed to get out and ran across the plowed field to the neighbours. My husband started after me, but he passed out in the field. When his stomach was pumped at the hospital, it was found he had drunk enough poison to kill a dozen men. In mercy, God had spared his life again.

At times my husband did pray, but he never fully surrendered. He finally ended up in the hospital as a result of alcoholism. Though the doctors gave him only a fifty percent chance to live, he still refused God's love. He passed away about four years later, but God helped me never to have any bitterness toward him, and I know I did all I could to see him saved.

In the meantime, God worked in other areas of my life. When I needed a job, a friend took me to a garment factory and I was asked to start work the next Monday. I worked at that job for over eighteen years and never missed one day for sickness. I give credit to the Lord for that.

God provided a home I could afford that was close to the church. It was completely furnished, even with linens and dishes. And, as always, the Lord's timing was just right. We nearly froze the night before we moved because our stove would not work anymore and the little electric heater had quit working. That house, even though it was old, seemed like Heaven after the years we had spent in the garage.

No detail was too small for the Lord to notice. Once my washing machine broke down. I was working full time and also trying to help my mother who had suffered a stroke. I had to do laundry for her every day. I washed the clothes in my bathtub and hung them in the basement. It was a very hard time. I didn't want anyone to know my situation, so I told no one. I didn't even pray about it. But one day the minister asked if I had a washing machine. He and another man from the church brought me one and installed it. The Lord provided my needs, even though I had not asked.

God undertook repeatedly for my children. Once, my two youngest boys went camping with a friend. They could not find a flashlight, so the other boy's grandmother gave them a large candle. After hiking all day, they set the candle on a large piece of cardboard in the tent, intending to tell stories. Instead, they fell asleep and when they woke up, everything was on fire. Both my boys were burned horribly. When the doctors had done all they could, they said there was only a fifty percent chance they would live. One boy's hand was burned so badly that the doctors thought they should amputate. We thought the other boy might be blind. However, the people of God joined with me in prayer. The hand was saved. The sight was there. Today it is impossible to tell that either of the boys was burned so badly.

During the Vietnam War, one of my sons was there. One day I had such a heavy burden of prayer for him that I could hardly get off my knees. Later I learned that he was to have driven a loaded gasoline truck to the front lines. At the last minute, he was pulled off the truck and someone else was sent instead. Sniper fire hit the truck and the driver was killed in the explosion.

God has been good to me. Everyone has hard places in life, but I am thankful the Lord has been with me to help and sustain me in all the difficulties I have faced. My greatest desire is to be faithful to the end. - Ruth Harshner