

In many ways I have lived a charmed life...

No health issues

The closest death has come to me is my grandparents and a nephew

I have an amazing job—actually the job of my dreams

My parents are both living and still married to each other

All 3 of my brothers are strong Christians and married to wonderful women

Great family—all of them doing good and amazing work—all of them love God

I feel really blessed with great friends and family that are supportive and caring

I've been able to travel—even lived internationally

I have a home I really enjoy here in Seattle

My life hasn't been without difficulty, but I really feel that I have been blessed

God has been very good to me

I have a strong sense that I'm going to be ok

God has answered prayer many times—sometimes dramatically, other times it's quiet and matter of fact
I'm convinced that God cares about me and meets my needs

God even helps me do the mundane things in life—figure out how to do things, give me insight

As a church, we have been blessed and aware of God taking care of us multiple times

As Walt used to say, we have never had to say no to something we felt God calling us to do

Even when money was tight, there was always enough to live into our callings faithfully

This last year God has more than met our needs—in unexpected and surprising ways

We have been incredibly blessed by the school wanting to buy our property and relocate us

Which is actually a miracle of win-win for both us and the school

We have a strong sense that God is not done with us and that we have a future

—that God wants Christ-centered Quakers in Seattle—that we have work to do

But what if it all falls apart—what if we go through this and the school can't get a permit to build here?

What if prayers are not answered?

What if the bottom falls out and we face true difficulties that aren't fixable?

I need to know that God is not only with me in the good times

I need to know that God is with me when everything falls apart—not just when things go well

And that God is just as present in the bad times as in the good times

Even that the bad times aren't always my fault and sent as a punishment or correction for me

I've been around long enough to know that bad things happen to good people

And I've observed that for some people it seems as if they have more than their share of trouble

Even though they are good people and do good things and live good lives—are deeply Christian

I've long since realized that simply following Jesus didn't mean everything turns out like I want

But it is easy to fall into the thinking that if we follow Jesus and do what we're told—all will work out

Because if God is really the source of this thing—it has to work out

And that conversely, if it doesn't work out—it is me who failed or didn't listen well enough

This became really clear to me when my first job out of seminary folded

I had been asked by the yearly meeting to start a church targeted to young adults

I moved and built connections—but it wasn't enough
It became clear that there wasn't a significant core group to form a solid basis for a church
In addition, young adults are very mobile and follow their dreams, often moving away
After 8 months or so, it was clear it was not working—at least not fast enough to support me
While I agreed that it was the right decision—truth is I felt like a failure—because God doesn't fail
I didn't work hard enough, smart enough, follow well enough, talk to the right people...
Or maybe I misinterpreted God's call and I wasn't supposed to do this
I talked on the phone to my younger brother, Doug, and he reminded me of Matthew 9 and 10
At the end of 9, Jesus says the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few—pray for workers
In 10, Jesus gives the disciples authority to drive out evil spirits and cure the sick
But he also says he is sending them out like sheep among wolves
And that if people do not welcome you, move on
I realized in that—that Jesus is always calling—but sometimes it doesn't all come together
A friend told me that I couldn't do everything I could do
I realized that even when God calls us—God does not guarantee success
On one hand I knew that but I hadn't owned it deep in my spirit
More than that I learned that God doesn't require success—God asks me to be faithful
That I am to walk with God step by step, day by day—and see what God does
That I'm to Listen for way forward and Listen again and Listen again
It isn't just one Listen then I go forward
But I Listen for change in direction—for new Leadings
For a response to new circumstances that appear

We are invited to pray and ask boldly for God to intervene in even the most difficult of circumstances
But I think it is so important to ask God how we are to pray
It is pretty easy to jump in with assumptions about the answer to the problem
But let me tell you—I can't count the number of times God didn't answer by my plan
Ask God what God wants to do in this particular situation
How am I to join God who is already at work
Sit and Listen for what God is saying before jumping in and asking for the answer
It is often surprising how we are Led

When we follow Leadings and it doesn't seem to be working—don't just try harder in the same way
Again stop and Listen—ask God if there is a new way that is opening
God how do you want me to go forward now? Given that things have changed, now what?

None of this diminishes my belief that God is good and that God answers prayer
Nor does it diminish my belief that God wants good things for me—and that God blesses us!
It simply means that we are invited to participate in the conversation and be in relationship
Life with God is a journey and it has ups and downs and God is in all of it

God is in the business of redemption—not just one-time redemption, but continual remaking of us
Romans 8:23-28 God is in the business of recreating good out of our lives all the time
Nothing is wasted in God's economy—even the hard stuff God uses and creates good

Story of Abraham at age 75 and the promise that he would be a great nation with offspring
—but Sarah was old and beyond the years of giving birth—an impossibility!
Abraham asks if his legacy will go through his servant who stands to inherit his estate—no!

God renewed his covenant with Abraham, promising as many offspring as there are stars
Sarah suggests that his offspring come through her maidservant Hagar—but no!
God reconfirms the promise when Abraham is 99
Three visitors come and say that Sarah will have a son this time next year—Sarah laughs!
25 years after the first promise when Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90—Isaac is born

It is a fun story and we love the outcome of the impossible birth that answers the promise
But in sitting with the story, I contemplated what it was like to wait 25 years for the answer
In this case, the promise never changed—but the human solutions were not the way forward
They were simply to be faithful and leave the miracle to God

We do believe in miracles—even today
God delights in giving us good things—even in simply giving us the desires of our hearts
But God is also with us in the disappointments
God is always recreating something out of the muddle we find ourselves in
God creates new and good out of everything that we bring to God
It might take awhile—but God is faithful

If the school can't get a permit to build on this property—we will stay here
Our first motion will be to ask God, now what? How do you want us to move forward here?
This journey has not been for naught—how are you going to use it to move us forward?
We will be faithful to the next step in God's Leadings for us!