



Who is God When Life Stinks?

Our “Smashing” Adventure

Amazing! Here we are driving to the Orlando airport on Thanksgiving morning!! Bob had just been disconnected from the wound vac yesterday. The nurses showed me how to pack his wound carefully –lots of bandaging and tape were required as there still was a serious opening in his chest. The doctor had hesitantly given his approval for our flight. Perhaps it was purely out of compassion, but we were absolutely delighted to be set “free to fly”!

Bob let me drive to the airport while he rested in the passenger seat of our car. We left home in the darkness of early morning with plans to pick up Crystal from our meeting place about 30 minutes away from the airport. We arrived at the location around 5:00 a.m. but there was no Crystal! A quick call to her house discovered that she had overslept.

Suddenly, a storm of panic began to shake Bob’s quiet composure. He knew that we would need lots of extra time to help him maneuver the large airport – waiting to check-in, passing through security gates, riding the tram to the gate and boarding the plane. Bob was determined to walk on his own through all this, but typically it requires 60-90 minutes for a healthy person to go through the whole process.

We sat together in our car, and the damp morning air seeped into our spirits. Our enthusiasm for this trip was dampened by a creeping sense of apprehension. Should we be doing this trip? Would we get to the airport on time? Could Bob’s strength hold up through the whole process of travelling?

Our adventure was only beginning as Crystal finally arrived. Sheepishly, she jumped in the car, tossed in her luggage, and I sped off to the airport. “Here’s the plan”, I said. “We need you to drop us at the check-in entrance and then go park the car at long-term parking. **IF** our flight leaves before you can get back to the terminal, we need you to figure out for yourself how to trade in or purchase a new ticket to join us later.”

Perhaps it sounded harsh, but Crystal has travelled much for her young age, and we knew she could handle this. Besides, Bob and I knew that we could barely handle *ourselves*, so we must try not to worry about the **IF**...

As we exited our car, I pulled luggage behind me and followed the faltering steps of my husband into the terminal lobby. My jaw dropped with what we saw. Who were all these people??? Why, on Thanksgiving morning, were they all here at our terminal? Shouldn't they be home throwing stuffing into their turkeys and filling their ovens with yummy foods?

Instead, they were filling the terminal with lines that were LONGER than any I had ever seen here before. Bob and I looked at each other and I saw a deep sense of desperation written in his eyes. It had taken all his strength to exit the car and enter the terminal. How could he possibly stand in line with these hundreds of other customers?

Just then, Bob noticed the front of his shirt was wet. In a weak, desperate voice he hollered above the noise around us – “Ruth, I’m leaking!” Surrounded by crowds, and weighed down with all the luggage, I had no idea what to do! Then, an airline agent appeared, intent on rearranging the line to allow room for the crowds to snake back and forth within the large lobby area.

“Sir”, I said with urgency in my voice as he walked past us. “My husband was just released from the hospital last week and is too weak to stand in line. Is there a wheelchair anywhere available?” I could not leave Bob’s side because he appeared ready to collapse at any moment. The agent immediately left his task of managing the line and was back almost instantly with a wheelchair. Bob’s sudden weakness made it easy to resign to sitting, and he collapsed into the seat.

The agent then said, “Follow me”, and started pushing Bob in the chair. I grabbed our many pieces of luggage and panted after them, as we tracked back to the entrance and then down to the “family line”. Here were strollers and family groups of travelers. The line was a bit shorter and the agent parked Bob’s wheelchair in a spot where he could stay while I once again began to snake through the ropes that were set up for luggage and trav-

elers who were waiting to check in.

I looked at my watch and then glanced over at Bob in the corner. It was easy to sense the feelings that must be crescendoing in his heart and mind right now – disappointment over arriving late, discouragement to realize how weak he really was, and a dampening enthusiasm for this family trip that already was brimming with challenges. It was obvious now that we had NOT enough time to clear check-in, security, and get to the gate. My heart was disappointed, but still believing that God had a plan in all of this. Suddenly, out of the hundreds of people and suitcases surrounding me, one set of hands reached from behind me and asked to take our luggage. I turned in my surprise to see a baggage attendant.

“Where did he come from?” I silently thought. “And just where is he planning to take our luggage?” I wondered.

Regardless, we were going nowhere at this point, and so I guessed we would not be needing that luggage!! When he asked for my license and the boarding pass that we had printed at home, I handed those over also. Bob glanced at my direction, and I just shrugged my shoulders. “Wonder if I’ll ever see any of those again!” I grimaced at the unknown factor of to whom and where I had handed over these things.

Then, there was a tap on my shoulder and with a smile across his face the bag attendant said, “You’re ready to go!” He handed back my license and boarding ticket with our gate number written across it.

“It’s time to go”, I told Bob, as I quickly dialed Crystal’s cell phone. She answered and said the parking shuttle had just dropped her off out front. By now, I was shaking from holding my breath, but I grabbed the wheelchair handles and we headed around the corner to security. We stopped again at the sight now ahead of us... More lines, hundreds deep, were in front of each security gate.

“Mom, look!” Crystal pointed to one security gate with NO LINE – reserved strictly

for wheelchairs and strollers. We whizzed through as I breathed a silent prayer of “Incredible!” and “Thank you!”

As we stood outside the doors of the arriving tram that would take us to Southwest gates, I realized that my “driving experience” for wheelchairs is novice at best. Bob had insisted on pushing himself while in the wheelchair at rehab. So, when we entered the tram, I hurriedly and awkwardly pushed the chair up over the lip. Bob winced. “Poor guy”, I thought. But we were rushing and I reasoned that we didn’t have time to be extra-careful. We still may not get to the gate in time.

In my hurry and worry, I completely ignored the “Hang on, the tram is ready-to-depart” warning. I was setting down my carry-on as the tram lurched forward. I heard Bob gasp, and looked up in time to see the wheelchair, with Bob, roll away from me - heading straight for the glass doors on the other side!! Ohhhh, NO!!

It had not occurred to me to set the wheelchair brakes! Instantly, I pictured Bob’s face and bandaged, bloody body splattered against the tram doors. I could almost hear the smashing sound of wheelchair into glass! My hand shot out, just as his feet hit the door. (Thank goodness for large feet that stuck out past the wheelchair foot rests!) “Oh honey, I’m so-o-o sorry!” I cried out to him. Then, the ridiculousness of our situation hit.

Here sat Bob, his wound by now was bleeding heavily through the bandages and a dark, red spot marked the front of his shirt. I looked a wreck as I hunched over the wheelchair, with carry-on luggage sliding off my shoulder. Crystal had the look of an “I just woke up” college student. ***What were we doing?!? What had we thought?!***

We had thought now for weeks about our need for a FAMILY THANKSGIVING! This desire was still burning in our hearts, but now we had serious doubts. “Would it really be possible?!”

Crystal took over pushing the wheelchair once the tram stopped (a wise choice, considering my driving safety record!) We literally RAN the distance toward our gate, as we

heard our names called over the airport loudspeakers.

Gasping, we managed weak smiles to the gate attendant who ushered us in and then closed the door behind us. As soon as we were seated and buckled, I pulled out bandaging and tape from the carry-on. As discreetly as possible, we unbuttoned Bob's shirt and added layers on top of layers to hold down the bleeding.

In two hours we should arrive in New Hampshire to see our precious family. It would be a short Thanksgiving weekend, and the many crises were far from over. But, truly, we had SO MUCH TO BE THANKFUL FOR!

Psalm 106:1

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;

His love endures forever.”

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