

Chapter 8

God's Providences

“He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.” Psalm 91:4

The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all. Psalm 34:19

God Healed My Truck

1 Thessalonians 5:18

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Here's a story that I've told many times as I preach sermons and share what God has done in our lives. I have had men come up to me after telling this story and accuse me of being a liar, that God doesn't and can't heal cars. My answer to that is that he has healed mine on many occasions, but I'm sorry that He hasn't done it for you.

I was in Uniontown, Pennsylvania for a weekend conference. I spoke at the men's group on a Saturday morning. I was on my way back to my motel. I expected to have a free afternoon where I could focus on preparing my mind and heart for the next full day of preaching and teaching on prayer. Uniontown is in a hilly area with some very steep inclines. As I approached my motel on the top of a hill there was a traffic light. When the light changed I was to turn left to go into the parking lot of the motel. Suddenly my truck decided to stall right in the intersection. Of course, to make matters worse my truck was standard shift. I had to put my foot on the clutch pedal and the brake at the same time to keep from rolling backwards and try to start the truck. It wouldn't start.

My 1998 Chevy S-10 was a wonderful truck and had given me many years of service without any trouble whatsoever. So, I was a little confused when my truck suddenly wouldn't start. I spent a few moments there at the traffic light with horns honking as I tried to get the car started. It would turn over and just sputter but not quite start. I was finally able to get it started but it was running very rough. I got through the traffic light and into the parking lot.

Needless to say, I was very frustrated that my truck chose this inopportune moment to start acting up. I've often observed that when you're doing the work of God Satan will put all kinds of obstacles in your way. This is particularly true when you are preaching on prayer or on overcoming the devil. Things that normally would be quite easy become very difficult and things that don't normally go wrong will suddenly go very wrong.

I wasn't too concerned about the truck so I went into the motel and put my belongings down, had my lunch and took a nap. I thought I'd just rest and the truck would cool down and be fine in just a few hours. I thought maybe it just overheated from navigating the steep hills in Uniontown.

About 2 o'clock in the afternoon I got up from my nap and went out to the car and breathed a little prayer for the truck to start. I tried the truck again with the same results. It turned over "rev, rev, rev, rev, rev, rev, rev" but it wouldn't catch. It would cough and start to catch, but then it would quit.

I didn't know exactly what to do so I went back into the motel and called the pastor. I asked if he might have a mechanic or somebody that works in a gas station that might take a look at my car. He said unfortunately it was a holiday weekend and all the mechanics were away. I was left to try to figure out the problem by myself. I am not a mechanic. I certainly don't know anything about engines and how to get them started. So, I did what I normally do, I prayed. I asked the Lord if He would cause the truck to start to function normally to save me a frustrating afternoon. Well, that was not the way it was going to work.

To get the proper picture here you have to understand that I was at least two hours from my home in Grove City. If I had to leave my truck with a mechanic on Monday my wife would have to come pick me up then drive back to Grove City. Then when the truck was repaired we would have to drive back to Uniontown on Tuesday or Wednesday. That would be a lot of driving and the expense of getting the truck fixed.

In my mind I was anticipating all of these confusing events and the expense, which I couldn't afford, and realized life was going to be very difficult for a couple of days. I called my wife and told her what was going on. I asked her to pray and ask the Lord to allow the truck to somehow get started so I could get home.

During the afternoon I periodically went out to the truck and tried to start it. Of course I would pray beforehand asking the Lord to make it start. But it wouldn't. I saw a gas station across the street that had no garage but a convenience store. I went over and I looked at some of the car care products they had on their shelves. They had some gas additives that you put into your gas tank that was supposed to help your car run smoothly, so I thought maybe that would help.

I went back to the truck, put the gas treatment into the tank, waited a while, and I tried starting it. It still would not start. I thought I'll just let it rest awhile. Perhaps the additive needed time to cycle through the engine. I waited about an hour then went back to try it again. The truck still would not start, in fact the battery was dying and matters were getting worse.

Then I really started to worry and fret. How was I going to get back home and get this thing fixed without a lot of expense and trouble? I called my wife again and asked her to really pray that God would do something so I wouldn't be stuck here. It could cost us hundreds of dollars to get this thing fixed and if we had to have it towed all the way back to Grove City that was really going to be very expensive.

I went back inside to try to meditate and think about my sermons and teaching lectures. While I was doing that the Lord reminded me of some of the things I was teaching.

I had been teaching about prayer and I was teaching about praise. I was teaching about being thankful in all circumstances and about worship. The Lord reminded me that I hadn't been thankful at all. I had been worrying and complaining about the truck and its inability to start. I had forgotten all the good times I had with this truck. I had forgotten that for at least eight years this truck had run beautifully without any problems. The Lord spoke to me that afternoon and said, "Why don't you try thanksgiving? Why don't you be thankful as you have been teaching others? *"In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."*

Don't you hate it when God wants you to do something very practical when you're frustrated? I was being very grumpy and dissatisfied. It was really upsetting my Saturday afternoon which in turn would upset me for Sunday morning by not having my mind prepared for the messages that would follow the next day. After thinking about it for a while and being under conviction that it was true, I agreed. I was not thankful, not in the least.

After settling that I need to be thankful I told the Lord I was sorry and I would try to be thankful in everything. I went out to the truck again and I walked around it. I actually put my hands on it, walked around it, and talked out loud and said, "Truck I really love you. You've been a great truck. You've served me well." Then I reviewed in my mind some of the things that have happened with the truck and how God has enabled me to use it without any trouble. As I did that I was really starting to feel the praise and thanksgiving welling up in my heart. I found myself thankful for the good times that God had given me.

I probably spent 20 minutes to a half hour walking around the truck and being thankful. After that I sat in the truck for a while and just praised the Lord giving thanks for His goodness and faithfulness. Then as I leaned over the steering wheel I whispered a prayer. "Dear Lord I really am thankful and I thank you for this truck and I thank you for the blessings you've given me through it and I thank you that you're able to do immeasurably more than we ask or think and even though the truck doesn't start I am determined that I'm going to give you thanks anyway for you do all things well...but it would certainly be a wonderful gift of God that you allow this truck to start and allow me to get home without any trouble."

At that point I put the key in the ignition and low and behold the engine started. It was no longer running rough. It was not sputtering and it was not stalling. There was nothing wrong with the engine. It was as if nothing bad had ever happened.

I decided I would go out and drive around a little. I did some shopping, got my supper and came back to the motel. Still nothing was wrong with that truck whatsoever. God healed my truck!

Is God able to heal mechanical troubles? Does God heal Chevy S-10's? My answer to that is, yes he does. No, he doesn't always do it. And no, He doesn't always bail us out when we need a miracle. But there are times that God is working something in our hearts that needs to be done and He is willing and able to do immeasurably more than we ask or even imagine.

God Heals a Car

Psalm 34:19

*Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the Lord delivers him out of them all.*

I might add to the story that that was not the only time God has healed a car or a mechanical vehicle. While I was in college five of my friends and I were traveling back from Nyack, New York to Toledo, Ohio in my friend's

Corvair. This was before route 80 was completed. There were lots of back road detours to get around the portions that were not completed.

It was probably about one or two o'clock in the morning when we were on one of those back hilly road detours that the Corvair for some unknown reason stopped and would not start. My friend was able to pull over to the side of the road on a very dark and dangerous spot in the roadway. He tried the car but it kept stalling. It wouldn't start. It wouldn't turn over. It wouldn't do anything. It was dead. We didn't know what to do. We opened the hood. The guys all messed around wiggling wires. We would have tried jumper cables, but there was no one around to jump the car. This was before the day of cell phones, so we couldn't call for help. We were getting very frustrated.

One of my friends was a little more mechanical than the rest of us and was able to look at the air filter and a few other things. We had a flashlight so he even checked the points to see if they were right. Everything seemed to be fine, but there was nothing that we could do. We sat there for an hour. As we sat there that hour wondering what to do one of my friends said, "Why don't we pray?" I don't know why prayer seems to be the last thing that comes to our minds when we have these kinds of mechanical problems. Perhaps it's that we believe God helps those who help themselves. Or maybe we don't believe God can heal mechanical issues.

God showed us as we sat in the car that we were to pray and praise the Lord. Each of us prayed a little prayer asking the Lord to somehow heal this car and make it run properly. We finished our prayer time and my friend put the key in the ignition and turned it over and the Corvair started! It ran just fine. We drove all the way to Toledo, Ohio that night and he had no more trouble with it. He dropped my friend off in Toledo then he dropped me off in Monroe, Michigan and then he went on to Dearborn where he lived. He had no more car trouble. I saw him when we got back to college and he said, "You know I had no more mechanical problems with that car. God healed my Corvair!"

Engine Freezes Up

1 Peter 4:12

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

There was another incident that took place that I'm embarrassed to tell you about because it was entirely my fault. I was delinquent in taking care of my car properly. You have to understand, we were earning a mere \$75 a week, so I didn't have any money to spare for scheduling proper maintenance. It was my Galaxy 500. We had just finished our Thanksgiving eve service and somebody had given us a \$25 gift. We decided that was enough to get us to Michigan to visit my family and then turn around and come back for Sunday services that weekend.

We drove to Michigan and had a wonderful time with family. After Thanksgiving was over we decided to drive back late on a Saturday in order to get back for church on Sunday. While we were traveling on the Ohio Turnpike the car engine began to knock very heavily. It sounded like there was something seriously wrong with it. We pulled off at one of the rest areas that had a gas station hoping someone on duty could help us figure out what was wrong. Well, nobody had any solutions and nobody had any mechanic on duty on a holiday weekend. We had to get off the turnpike and look for a gas station with a garage to help. We inquired at several places if there was a mechanic on duty that could help us find the problem. No mechanics were available on a holiday weekend.

So, we had no choice but to drive on hoping to get home safely. Soon the check oil light went on and began blinking at us. I checked the oil level to see if it needed more, but it seemed to be full. I even bought some more oil and poured some STP into the engine as well. We drove from the middle of Ohio all the way back to Clymer, Pennsylvania, all the while praying that the Lord would somehow get us home safely or provide a mechanic that could fix our car since no garages were open that weekend.

We got to Pennsylvania driving the back roads to get to Clymer. By then the car was really making a racket. It felt like it was falling apart, like the whole thing was going to blow up on us. We prayed and asked the Lord to help us get home. We entered our back driveway and pulled up to the garage and stopped. Immediately the engine quit and wouldn't start again. It had completely frozen up.

God allowed us to get home safely and we were glad. We were able to get back for Sunday morning services. We knew that we had an expensive repair to do on the car and had to have it towed somewhere. As I said, we

were not wealthy, we made \$75 a week and that was not much even back then in the early 70's. We had no extra cash, that's why \$25 as a gift was given to us so we could go to Michigan. We were able to arrange a tow to get the car to the next town with a Ford dealer to look it over.

When we finally got the call from the Ford Dealer he was very upset. He said, "Young man do you realize what happened here? You have not changed oil and filter in your car for a long time. The oil was so dirty it clogged up the oil pump so that oil could not circulate. While you were traveling the oil pump couldn't pump the oil so your engine was running without oil for at least 300 miles. It was a miracle that you ever got home safely."

I tell you that story not because I'm proud of it but because God is merciful and gracious to those who are stupid, those who are less than careful, and those who are not mechanical. Even in our stupidity God is gracious and good. When we make mistakes, and even when it's our fault, God is faithful to protect us.

**“When God put a calling on your life
He already factored in your stupidity.”
-- Graham Cooke**

Our Crazy Opel

James 1:12

*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial,
for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life,
which God has promised to those who love him.*

While we were students at Nyack College Marilyn and I got married in our junior year. The next year we had a child so we were living off campus in a ranch type home in a basement apartment of one of our college professors. My parking place was across the street in a gravel spot next to the road. It was not in a convenient place to park or to work on a car.

I had purchased a 1968 Opel. It was an attractive little car. It gave me good gas mileage. It did everything I wanted it to do except for a couple things.

First, if it rained, or it was foggy or humid, it would not start. I took it to the Buick dealer to have it looked at. They said unfortunately this was a trait of this 1968 Opel. They tried a tune up, changing the spark plugs and wires, resetting the points and changing the distributor cap. Nothing helped. They suggested that we spray some silicone on the distributor cap and if all else failed not to drive it when it rained.

Second, the Opel was a stick shift and the clutch was going bad. Again, not being a mechanic I took it down to the Buick dealer to have them look at it. They told me the clutch was burned out and needed to be replaced at the cost of \$600. That was way more than this college student could afford, so I had to look for another less expensive solution.

I was working a full-time school custodian job at night. We had college friends that were working with us who knew mechanical things. One friend suggested that I could change the clutch myself. Another had been a mechanic and he said he would give me step by step instructions and guide me through the process. I decided I could probably do that if I parked the car far enough off the road not to interfere with the traffic that the zoomed by. I could probably buy the clutch and do it myself. So, that's what I did. I went down to the Buick dealer and found the price of the clutch was going to be \$42 .

I would have to work on this car out in the open air without a garage and without a lot of mechanical tools. I also needed to find a time to do it while the weather was mild. It was the fall of the year and I decided this was a good time to begin the process.

I followed the list my mechanical friend gave me and was successful and quite pleased with myself for getting the clutch out. It took me several hours over a two or three day period, but I was successful. Next, I needed to go to town to buy the clutch and clutch plate. Having no other transportation I walked a mile down the long hill to the Buick dealer in Nyack to buy the materials.

I happened to be wearing coveralls that someone loaned me. These were long overalls mechanics use with lots of pockets for tools. Marilyn gave me the money from our little budgeting envelopes. It was exactly \$42, two twenties and two ones. I tucked it into my coverall pocket and made my long trek to town.

I got to the Buick dealer, walked in, told him what I needed, gave him the parts number, and he brought the clutch out to me. I reached in my pocket to pay for it and discovered the money was not there. I didn't realize coveralls had holes for you to hang your tools as well as real pockets. I had put the money into the bottomless pocket!

I lost the only \$42 we had for this project. Our budget envelopes were empty after paying all our bills. I walked a mile up the hill to get back to the college and our home praying all the way. I looked diligently in every gutter and bush to find where the money might have fallen out. I called Marilyn's brother who was also at the college to help me out. We prayed about it and decided to walk together looking on both sides of the road. He was looking on one side; I was looking on the other. The wind was blowing about twenty miles an hour so we had little hope of finding it unless the Lord would provide.

Bill eventually yelled, "I found a \$20 bill!" Praise the Lord! There was hope after all. A little while later I found another \$20 bill in the bushes in the opposite direction the wind was blowing. We never did find the two dollar bills, but my brother-in-law loaned me two dollars so I could get the clutch and finish. We were overjoyed with the miracle that God provided in finding that money.

I made my way back up the hill and tried to finish the job replacing the clutch. The story is not over. The weather suddenly turned cold and snowy and I was outside in the street trying to fix my car. In freezing weather, exposed to the wind and snow, I got the clutch plate attached. Next came the clutch itself. It had to be placed in between the flywheel and clutch plate before tightening it down. That's when I realized I didn't have the tool I needed to align the clutch to the clutch plate. It had to be exactly in the center and required a special tool.

I talked to my friend and he told me there was a tool that I would need to borrow from the Buick dealer. Again I walked down to the Buick dealer and asked if I could borrow the tool to align the clutch and clutch plate. They refused to loan me the tool, but they would sell it to me for \$100. Well, I couldn't buy it so I walked back up the hill. I went to work the next day and told my friend what the problem was. He said there was another way. You could actually design your own tool whittling it of wood. It wouldn't be perfect but it would line it up to the center. I got it pretty well lined up.

There were six bolts to hold the clutch plate to the flywheel. In my hurry I over tightened one of the bolts and it sheered off. The next night I told my friend what happened. He asked how many bolts were on there and I said well I think there were six. He explained that I would have to buy a tap set to get the old bolt out and then re-tap it and put in an oversized screw. Then he said, "I'll tell you what. It won't be a problem if you just leave it with five bolts. That would be more than enough to hold the clutch plate on." So that's what I did. I put it all back together in a snowstorm and finally got the Opel back together. It ran fine for a few more years until I traded it for another car.

Four Flats in One Day

1 Peter 1:6-7

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

When you're doing God's work there are lots of things that go wrong. When you're working in Brazil, which is a spiritist culture, you can be sure that the devil is involved in making many things go wrong.

It wasn't uncommon in Brazil for us to get flat tires. There were many horse drawn carts on the roads that the poorer classes used to transport building supplies. The horses often threw a shoe and the nails ended up in the road and people got flat tires. So for us it was not unusual to have a flat tire. We would change it and go to the tire shop to have it repaired.

One particular day stands out in my memory because it involved at least four flat tires in the same day. It happened to be a time when college youth corp workers came from the United States to help us with our ministry. The first flat took place as I went to cross the town, which was around 15 miles to pick up our children from school. On the way I had a flat tire. I had to change the tire for the spare and drop the original off to be repaired. All this made me late for picking the kids up from school.

I took the kids back home and stopped at a tire shop to pick up the repaired tire. Then Marilyn needed the car to go across town to a ladies meeting. On her way to the meeting she had a flat tire. She was able to find a phone and called me to let me know what was happening. I said there wasn't much I could do about it, not having another car. She eventually found somebody to help change the tire. When she got back I took it to the tire store to be repaired. That was flat tire number two.

Then the evening came when the youth corps workers were coming in by the bus and needed to be picked up at the bus station. On the way to the bus station I had another flat tire, making me late picking them up. We got to the bus station and were able to pick up the four youth workers putting their luggage high on the roof rack of the car. Imagine five big people with their luggage packed in and on top of a small car. I mentioned to them that we already had three flats that day. As we sat in the parking lot packing things into the car I could hear a hissing sound of air leaking out of the tire, and I had no spare to change it.

I told them what we had been through that day with three flat tires already and the fourth one was deflating. It was already late at night. We were about 25 miles from center city and had to go through the entire city to get to

the other side of the town where our home was. I said, "Guys we need a miracle. We have to make it home on this tire. It's the middle of the night. It's dangerous on the streets of Porto Alegre and there's no place to get a tire repaired at this time of night."

We drove all the way praying that God would enable that tire to stay inflated until we got to our house. Thankfully we made it to our house. As we pulled into the driveway I got out of the car and I stood there with the four students and said, "Listen!" We all listened as the last air escaped from that tire and it went flat.

It seems like a small thing that one would have four flat tires in one day. But it illustrates the difficulties of working as a missionary in a culture of spiritism and the occult. Satan opposes the work of ministry. He can do it through electronics, he can do it through flat tires, through people, or through life events. He is going to hinder you in any way he can.