

March 25, 2012

A Few Of The Reasons Why I Have No Doubt About The Existence Of God

It has been widely reported that a reporter asked the infamous bank robber, Willie Sutton – later denied by Willie - why he robbed banks, and without hesitation he answered; “Because that’s where the money is.” If anyone had asked me, while I was still in my early twenties why I became an airline pilot, I would most certainly have replied, because that’s where the girls are.

My BC friends – those who knew me before Christ came into my life – know what kind of person I was before I was born again. My daughter, Tracey wrote in her college application letter that the change in her father was more than enough proof for her that God was real. Since then, God has honored me and my family in more ways than I can count, but unfortunately, I have not always been as honoring to Him as I could have been.

I spent the first couple of days this week at the Emory University Winship Cancer Center, and the news wasn’t good. After almost three and a half years of fighting melanoma, and prostate cancer - nine surgeries, a case of shingles, and 104 days of radiation treatment - my only win has been over the prostate cancer. Tomorrow I start chemotherapy. The treatment requires hospitalization for five days, and then two weeks at home. Depending on my tolerance and results, I might receive as many as five rounds, which could take as long as three months.

It’s not all bad. My younger brother passed away suddenly at age 68, and at age 76 I have had lots of down time to read, and think, and talk with family and friends, and draw closer to God. After the last surgery, I decided to get my priorities more in order. For the rest of my time as a visitor on planet earth, I want honoring God to be at the top of the list.

A couple of mornings ago, Joan and I were enjoying our coffee, and talking about all the supernatural encounters we have had with God since I became a Christian, and I am going to tell you about a few.

COMING TO CHRIST

I wrote about my first encounter with God in the January 1981 issue of The Trim Tab, a publication of the Fellowship of Christian Airline Personnel. I quoted it in my reminisces of the Delta Golden Years. It’s redundant for some, nevertheless here it is again.

Suddenly, the silence was broken by an audible voice calling my name.

“Gene.”

Get the picture. I'm driving down Stratford Road in Buckhead, I'm cold sober in a very quiet car, and I hear my name called in an audible voice. Maybe even more supernatural was my answer.

"Yes, Lord,"

I replied instantly without thinking. I answered as naturally as if I knew He was my passenger and I was expecting a conversation. Then He said:

"You have made promises to me since you were 16 and thought you were going to die, and you have never kept any of those promises."

He paused, and I said nothing. Then God said:

"Tonight is your last chance."

Another short pause, and then:

"You think your recent business success is because you pulled yourself up by your bootstraps."

Another pause:

"It's only because I let you."

End of conversation. The only thing I said was "Yes, Lord."

Coming to Christ is always supernatural. The way He came to me might be less supernatural than most, because most people come to Christ before hearing "Tonight is your last chance." God was honoring the prayers of my mother.

I have learned that wives and young grandchildren will tell you the truth about yourself. This morning, I asked Joan if I was narcissistic before I became a Christian. "No, you were just arrogant."

Sorry I asked, but I can rationalize, and blame it on others. My dad was busy putting food on the table as the country came out of the great depression, and I learned how to be a man from John Wayne, Humphrey Bogart, Clark Gable, Hopalong Cassidy, et al. The first time I tried to pray with Joan, I realized that I had been posing as a strong man who had all the answers. To pray with her, I was admitting to both of us that I was not the man I had been pretending to be. It was much later before I understood that she – like most wives - she knew that from our first date.

First Prophecy Experience

I was learning how to be a husband, father, and the priest in my family. We had become active in the Cathedral of St. Philip, but we were still “baby Christians.” Joan and I found ourselves assigned to pray for a half hour in the wee hours of the morning at a 24 hour prayer vigil. I was very concerned about our ability to pray for 30 minutes. I had thought I had volunteered for the afternoon, but I had made a 12 hour mistake on the signup sheet. C.L. Chandler was praying in the church chapel when we arrived.

The late C.L. was the son of a Buckhead dentist. He was a short fellow – most folks are in comparison to my 6’ 5” - about our age, and known as a fanatic. He came over and knelt with us, and started praying. He prayed for about 15 minutes before getting to his feet, and I was relieved because we now only had 15 minutes to pray, instead of 30. But instead of leaving, he stood behind me and said; “God has a word for you.” To say that I was skeptical would be an understatement. The skepticism vanished when the first thing he told me was a deep secret from my past that not even Joan knew. He went on to tell me that God was going to honor me, and he had chosen me to be a lay leader in the church with some details about what to expect. Everything C.L. said that night came to pass over the next several years. I was elected to the Chapter at the Cathedral, elected to the board of trustees of a Christian university, and invited to speak in numerous churches. The best of all was being one of the founding members of Atlanta’s Church of The Apostles.

Answered Prayers

We have had many answers to prayer. God always answers prayers, although the answer is not always the one we were seeking. The following two prayers were about our daughters, Anne and Tracey. When they were pre teens, Joan and I were testifying in churches frequently, and we were scheduled to be in a church in another state on a weekend. Tracey was a year behind Anne in school, and they ran around with completely different crowds. Little brothers and sisters are not often invited to hang out with their older siblings. Anne had been invited to a slumber party at Kelly’s home that Saturday night, and Tracey didn’t have any place that Joan thought was satisfactory. She felt that we needed to cancel our plans if something didn’t become available for Tracey. We were all together in the family room and Joan and I stepped into another room and quickly prayed that if God wanted us to testify that weekend, please provide a provision for Tracey. Within 60 seconds the phone rang. It was Kelly talking with Anne about the party. Out of the blue, Anne suddenly blurted; “Kelly, mom and dad are going to be out of town Saturday, would it be okay if I bring Tracey to the party?” Tracey was sitting at a table reading, and she did a double take, because she had no idea that little sister would be included.

Years later, spring break was approaching during Anne’s senior year in high school, and I planned a trip for the 4 of us to a highly recommended New Mexico dude ranch. Less than a week before the trip, Tracey asked if one of her best friends, Emily could go with us. Emily’s dad, Henry had accepted the position of Dean of the Law School of George Mason University, and they would be moving away in the summer. Of course the answer was yes, but when I called the ranch to add one there was no space. In fact

they had a waiting list, and if we wanted to cancel, they would return our deposit. We canceled, and I started looking for alternate places. Al Gore had not yet invented the internet, so finding suitable accommodations was not as easy as now, but in a couple of days I secured a delightful house on a beautiful beach in the Bahamas. About 36 hours before we were to leave Anne called – she was out with her friends. Joan and I were in bed with the TV, and Anne explained that she wanted to go on the senior trip to Florida because she would probably never see some of her friends again. Joan gently tried to change her mind to no avail. She hung up the phone, and said, “let’s pray”. My answer was, “pray _____ I want to hit someone!” That’s right, that’s a quote. I am justified, but sanctification is a slow work in progress. I had spent days making and changing reservations. I was not a happy camper. Joan took my hand and said; “God, in the name of Jesus, put your desire for Anne’s vacation on her lips.” This time, the phone rang within 30 seconds, and Anne told her mother about all the staying up all night, the sand in the beds, and several other reasons why she had rethought her plans, and wanted to go to the Bahamas with her family rather than Florida with her class.

It was January 1, 1983 when I injured my knee skiing at Beaver Creek. I made the mistake of following Dr. Paul Walker, the Mt. Paran Church of God pastor down a closed black slope. Bill Bondurant was my orthopedic surgeon, and I was scheduled for surgery. The plan was to open the knee, because there was too much damage for the scope. A group at church prayed for healing, and Dr. Paul Walker, anointed me with oil and prayed. The night before the surgery, I dreamed that my knee was healed. I woke up and moved it without pain and all the swelling was gone. I went back to sleep, and dreamed again that I should get up and walk. I did, and everything was normal. I showed for my appointment with Dr. Bondurant, and he said he had not seen anything like that in his 40 years of medicine. Bill is the father of Kelly, Anne and Tracey’s hostess for the aforementioned slumber party. The next day after the canceled surgery, I flew a 767 to West Palm Beach, played 18 holes, and ran 3 miles.

Lily

It was mid 1999. Anne was pregnant with our first grandchild. Those who are grandparents will understand why I said our first grandchild, rather than Anne’s first child. My anticipation of that arrival was infinitely more exciting than waiting for the arrival our children had been. They didn’t yet know the sex, so they were busy choosing both a boy and girl name. They quickly agreed on the name for a boy, but were struggling to choose a girl’s name. They just couldn’t seem to find one they both liked.

God used a series of happenings to choose the child’s name. Joan woke in the middle of the night Still half asleep, she clearly heard God speak to her spirit – not audibly, but as clearly as if it had been - He said, “the child’s name is Susannah.” At this point, we still didn’t know the sex of the child. Joan had told me about the name, but was reluctant to mention it to Anne and Clay. After the sonogram disclosed a girl, it was apparent that there was still a little stress between the two of them, because every name one would suggest, the other didn’t like. Joan decided it might relieve the tension if she told Anne about receiving the name, Susannah.

Both parents agreed if God really had chosen the name, that is what the name would be, but there was some doubt, and they kept looking. Our other daughter, Tracey was a physician, on the staff of the Washington University Barnes Hospital in St. Louis. Lily was a senior medical school student from Asia who had been on a rotation with Tracey in the hospital. She was very pretty, extremely bright, and she had a wonderful personality. Tracey told Anne about her, and how much she liked her name. Lily – for the first time a name that both Anne and Clay liked. Under normal circumstances the case would have been closed, the name would be Lily, but they were still troubled. If God said the name was Susannah, the name would be Susannah.

Fast forward a few weeks to January 2000. Anne was in her ninth month as Clay was looking for a book in Barnes and Noble. Anne decided to leave the store and wait for him in the car. She paused as she passed a shelf full of name books. One caught her eye, but it was fifteen dollars, and the decision had been made. They both liked Lily best, but they didn't have peace about it. They knew they couldn't choose Lily if God had chosen Susannah, but it would be one or the other.

It was a blustery winter day as Anne walked out the door. She immediately spied a twenty dollar bill that someone had dropped in the parking lot. The wind was swirling, and she was too pregnant to chase it. She didn't need to. The wind took care of it. It was if she was a baseball infielder, and a soft ground ball had bounced waist high into her hand.

Aha, a free book she thought as she walked back into the store, and purchased the one that had caught her eye. She looked up Susannah, and found:

Susannah \s(u)-[sannah](#), [sus\(an\)-nah](#)\ as a girl's name is of [Hebrew](#) origin, and the meaning of Susannah is "[lily](#)".

Phoebe

Our daughter, Tracey was an assistant professor at the University of Pittsburg Medical School while Eric was a spine fellow there. They had decided it was time to start a family but it wasn't happening, and In vitro was decided on. It worked; Elizabeth is now a beautiful strawberry blonde nine-year-old. Lo and behold, Luke came along naturally fourteen months later.

All was well and good, except there were still ten fertilized eggs. Looking at Elizabeth reminded her that there might be ten more like her. She almost felt it was like abortion if she left those embryos there. She fretted, prayed, and made the decision that she was not going to abandon them. The embryos had been frozen for three years. She and Eric made an appointment to visit the In vitro clinic, and when they arrived the doctor told them he had "bad news". Eight had died as they thawed out, and the last two were dying. He didn't think they would be viable. He said, since you have proven you can have children naturally, I would not undergo the risk and expense of inserting these. He

recommended they not be used. Tracey burst into tears, and Eric said; “Doc, are they technically alive?” He said they were still technically alive. Eric said; “The bailiwick of life is Gods, not yours, put them in.”

Phoebe showed up nine months later. She is three years younger – by human terms - than her fraternal twin, Elizabeth. I panic a little bit when I think how easy it would have been to miss out on the joy she brings us if she had been abandoned. Two more natural ones have come along since, totaling five for Eric and Tracey.

Eric, Tracey, and the five spent the weekend with us in Atlanta, because I am starting the chemo tomorrow. This morning Phoebe was the first one up. My heart melted when she came from bed directly to my bed, and said, “Papa, I love you,” as she gave me a big hug.

More prophecy and Melanoma

If I wrote about all the answers to prayer and prophetic things that have come true in our lives, it would take a book, and I won't do that. I do want to tell you about some messages we have received about my longevity on this earth. The neurosurgeon that operated on me four months ago left no doubt that my condition was terminal. His condition is also terminal, and so is yours. I am writing this in hopes that I can encourage some people, and possibly influence at least one unbeliever into believing that eternal life is possible for them.

As you have probably discerned, I am blessed with a wife who spends much more time with God than I do. About two years ago when we thought we were staying out in front of Melanoma, Joan was awakened in the middle of the night with Isaiah 38:5 on her mind. She had no clue what that verse was all about, and she went back to sleep immediately. It stayed on her mind, and she read it the next day.

Isaiah 38:5 "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.'"

Bear in mind that we didn't think this Melanoma was as serious as it has become, but we knew the message was for me.

A couple of weeks before the last surgery, we heard from an old friend that we hadn't had any contact with for at least ten years. He is another guy that lots of people call a fanatic. He said that God had given him a word for me as he prayed. It was rather lengthy, but the bottom line was that “this sickness is not unto death.”

Meanwhile, another well-known pastor, who has been praying for me daily has told me three times that God is not through with me yet.

Have we misheard God? Possibly, but we never have before. Whenever God chooses to take me is His business. I pray I will be able to stay around for a while to watch my

grandchildren grow. I would love to see at least some of them walk down the aisle at their weddings.

I have had the privilege of leading a few of my friends to Christ, but I still have some who don't have a personal relationship with Him. I pray that all my friends will know Him.