

Trial By Fire

By: Jim Hohnberger

Friday had been a hot summer day with a fantastically blue sky. However, when I stepped out my backdoor that afternoon, I knew something was dreadfully wrong. To the north and to the south the sky was the same beautiful blue, but directly overhead smoke obscured the sky, not just over my house, but trailing far off over Glacier National Park. Sally and I stood outside watching as ash, some of it still containing live embers, drifted down on us like snow. I got in the car and drove up Wedge Canyon and about nine miles from our home I found the fire! It was demonstrating what the professionals call “extreme behavior” and flames rose hundreds of feet in the air. Already about 50 acres were burning in just the first four hours and it was expanding rapidly. Clearly this fire was going places and like a loaded gun, it was aimed directly at our home.

Over the next two days the fire doubled in size and doubled again, marching directly toward us. At this rate, it would reach us by Monday evening. Already one could face the fire from our back steps and feel the unmistakable hint of heat from the flames. Our property was prepared as best

we could, but we knew that against this monster only Divine power could spare our wilderness retreat. The sheriff and other officials tried to get us to evacuate. However, in keeping with our rights under the law, we signed a waver and stayed. It was not that we would sacrifice our lives for our home; it was that the Lord had not made it clear that we should leave. A sign was placed at the end of our driveway in keeping with the regulations. It said in large letters, “STILL HERE”.

The sign was effective. It brought the local TV station in to talk with us. They liked our story and filmed why we were here when almost everyone else was gone. We gave glory to God for the peace and lack of fear that we had experienced through this so far. We truly were not concerned over the loss of our property or our home. Though it was not our desire to see them burned, we knew that if it occurred our Heavenly Father had allowed this for our own good and benefit. We realized that our battle was staying content within the Lord’s watch care and remaining at peace amid the storm of troubles surrounding us.

God answered our prayers and the fire stalled just west of us and then turned northeast. Rumors however, flew thick and fast. "You've got to evacuate! The fire is going to cross North Fork Road at Whale Creek just to the south of you and the fire is also pushing across the road to the north. If you don't leave right now, you'll be trapped with no way out!"

These rumors turned out to be half-truths and we suspected as much from the beginning. You see I had been standing on a ridge watching the fire and knew where it was and what it was doing. God was so good to have arranged circumstances so we would not be lead astray by these false reports. This is why each must have their own connection to God thereby never, never relying on any other person to tell us what is truth and what is error. We must learn to lean and put our full trust in God and His Word. Our response was that we were not going to panic over another person's panic; instead we checked out these rumors by first hand investigation. We understood the danger of our situation, but were not going to make it worse by ill-considered actions.

Six days after the fire was reported, it crossed the North Fork Road just 4/10ths of a mile north of us. The wind driven fire swept in with 200-foot high flames and tree after tree would singe slightly, begin to smoke and then with a roar and a pop explode into a pillar of flame only to repeat the process moments later on a nearby tree. It was an awe-inspiring sight as it easily jumped the river and began burning its way into Glacier National Park.

At last leaving nature's destructive display, we went to bed about 10:30pm. Not surprisingly after what we had just witnessed, we couldn't sleep. The fire had us cornered with one flank just 300 yards to our west and the other less than a half-mile to our north and humanly there seemed no escape. Rising, we found the wind had

shifted and a red fire ball threatened us from the north. We drove the trailer filled with our irreplaceable items to a friend's house and went back to see if our place had survived, only to find that once again our prayers had been answered. The winds had died down and we were safe—for the moment that is.

Four days later, ironically, the very day we had planned to start the open house, the fire swept in from the south in a 100 foot wall that washed over our driveway creating an arch of flame through which we evacuated as fire fighters prepared for the final defense of our home. They told us later that not a hose had to be raised to defend our house. As the division commander said, "I've been in this business 30 years and this is almost enough to convert me. This was definitely Divine intervention. Your God works for you in mysterious ways, Jim Hohnberger."

The fire had now burned a horseshoe shaped area around us, but the main body still lurked to the west and would continue several times to launch smaller scale attacks on us and the fire fighters who worked to defend us. By this time the "Still Here" sign had become an icon, almost a battle cry for those defending our place. We remained, almost five acres of green in a sea of blackened ruins. Everyone knew that there was something special, something supernatural happening at our home.

By God's Grace the only time I had wavered in my inner peace was when we had to evacuate for three hours after the 100 foot wall of flame came in and what bothered me then was not the loss of the home but simply not knowing if we had indeed lost it. Now when the danger seemed to be lessening, we got a new fire crew. One windy afternoon the fire again made a run at us and to my astonishment, the fire fighters just stood there. I couldn't believe

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it. I pleaded, demanded, and entreated for them to help me move the heavy fire hoses to the new threat, but it seemed impossible to get more than a handful to help and that grudgingly.

Sally and Janell realizing the seriousness of the situation knelt in front of everyone and prayed that God would help. God loves the prayer of faith and rewards the prayer that grasps heavens promises. Jesus delights to answer such an entreaty, the wind shifted, a fire truck rolled in to help, but still the new crew mostly just watched me struggle. Oh, I can't tell you how upsetting this was. We eventually got the hose where it was needed and fire out, but I had been extremely frustrated and tempted to let go of God because of the fire crew's negligence. Mike, the Division Commander heard about what happened and was very upset and apologetic. He sent in his whole division the next day: that's 200 men and 23 fire trucks and water tenders with orders to spend the whole day soaking everything about our property under his personal supervision. The situation had been a terrible trial. Yet, God used it to bring more help to our little property than some whole fires ever receive.

God had the situation in His hand. He knew what He was doing. The question is can He trust me to cooperate and remain in Him when things don't look like He is in control? We were sustained and had peace with whatever the outcome God would choose for nearly a month of uncertainty and this is the issue in our personal lives, my friends. Have you tasted of such peace amid the fires and storms of your life? You can! Whether you are threatened by a marriage problem, an employment situation, poor health, or financial matters, God has a solution no matter how hopeless it seems. To human eyesight our property was hopelessly lost to the fire and yet God spared

not only our home, but left us so that our views in every direction are of beautiful green trees and majestic mountains.

He is willing to save you in or from the fires of life as well. The outcome of life's crisis's are not always positive, but God will sustain you no matter what you are called to bear. He calls to you and me today, "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have thee by thy name: thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flames kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD, thy GOD." Isaiah 43:1-3 KJV

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Power for Living

The full story of Hohnberger's fire experience can be found in Jim's new book *Come to the Quiet*, available now.



Power to become the sons of God. —John 1:12

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