

Josh Gebhardt

I'm not sure how many of you were here when my wife and I shared our testimony a few years ago. I wanted to briefly summarize our story and then share my testimony about how God has continued to carry us and bless our lives beyond what I could ever imagine.

In 2014 my wife suffered multiple injuries from a car accident. She shattered her right knee cap, tore a tendon in her left leg, and had life threatening trauma to her brain. She was transported by life flight to the hospital where she would spend roughly the next three weeks in a coma. During that time she suffered a stroke, multiple seizures, and underwent emergency surgery to take pressure off of her brain which likely saved her life. When she woke from her coma we learned that her brain could no longer properly relay messages to her mouth, rendering her unable to properly form words or speak coherent sentences. It is estimated that she was only able to comprehend about 30% of what was being said to her, she could no longer read or write, and because of the injuries to her knees and muscle loss in a coma she would basically have to relearn how to walk. Nobody could tell us if or how much Jessica would recover.

In an effort to keep a very long and very emotional story short I'll say this....most of you have seen my wife here in church and can see how far she's come. She is the toughest and hardest working person I've ever met, and I know she'll join me in telling you that God is the reason for her recovery, which has been nothing short of a miracle. Though she continues to get better, the vast majority of her recovery took place over the next 2&1/2 to 3 years. During that time God provided for us in every way. He carried us.

So we'd survived this long storm in our lives, but once it was over we seemed to find ourselves in a state of limbo. The life we'd once built seemed like a distant memory. This was a particularly difficult time. Jess was dealing with a lot of complex emotions as she worked to adjust to life after her recovery. I was burnt out and stressed out at work, and struggling with my own emotions. It was apparent that we could no longer afford our home, and we had complete uncertainty about what was next in life or which direction we should go.

From that point in time it is like God forged a path for us and then carried us along.

When we'd first put our house on the market it generated quite a bit of interest, but we had no buyers. Months had gone by without so much as a viewing. It looked bleak, and I'll admit that I'd pretty much lost hope. Until one day out of the blue our realtor called. Not

about a showing or an interested party, but with an offer. We reached a fair agreement a few days later and just like that our house was sold.

At work I was joking that I wish I could be a janitor. It was the only foreseeable way for me to get out of my position as a probation officer for something less stressful while still allowing me to maintain my retirement, benefits, and seniority. Only problem was that no positions looked like they'd be opening in the near future. A couple months after we sold our house I found myself on the verge of what was probably a nervous breakdown. I had pretty much been begging God for a way out when, once again out of the blue, my friend and coworker walked in my office and informed me that a janitor position had just been posted. I went to my boss and explained my situation. With her blessing I applied and was given the job a few days later.

Two of the biggest strains in our lives were gone just like that. It was like God reached down and simply lifted them out of our lives.

Jess and I moved in with my grandma temporarily while we were waiting for a new place to call our own. Life was no doubt getting easier but we were still in a state of limbo. Jess was searching for a new sense of purpose since she no longer worked as a nurse.

We were on our way home from Mansfield one Saturday morning when she broke the news....she was pregnant. Suddenly there was excitement, purpose, and hope for the future again. God was continuing to work in our lives.

It was only about 3 months later when my mom was forced to take a detour on her way back into town. She turned down a street she never, ever drives only to see a "for sale" sign in front of a cute little house. The house wasn't listed with a realtor. So we'd never have ever found it in our searches. We gave it a look, made an offer, and just like that we were buying our future home. God's fingerprints were all over that situation.

So just to recap...in the span of about 7 months God put a new job in my lap, blessed us with a baby on the way, and gave us a home. He had handed life back to us, with a special blessing on the way.

God is so good, and life was good, and I was content with my new job, but I wanted to get involved in some way. I wanted to serve Him. I began to pray for Him to show me where I could serve His Kingdom.

Then, as a little icing on the cake, a few months ago a dear friend stopped by with more news. I'm sure most of you know Verna Schifer. On a whim she brought my name up to

Pastor Mike and then stopped by our house to visit. Pastor Mike and I's paths had seemingly, randomly crossed several times in past years. It started with a random Friday night in 2012 or 2013. I limped my car into his driveway with a flat tire. Then when Jess got hurt it just so happened that our pastor in New Washington was getting ready to leave for a mission trip to Africa. So he called his friend to meet me at the hospital. That friend was Pastor Mike. A couple of years after that Jess and I were meeting with Pastor Mike about the opportunity to share our testimony at this church. We'd discussed my getting involved in the ministry here, but the timing was never quite right.....until that afternoon Verna stopped by. It wasn't long after that visit that I was sitting down in Bob Evans with Pastor Mike discussing the possibility of a chance to serve God by working with the church's youth.....And now here I stand.

So that is our testimony of how faithful and loving our God is. Of how he orchestrated a fresh start for us and not only restored Jessica's health, but rebuilt our life from the shambles it once appeared to be...now here comes the humbling part.

When I step back and examine where my life is and all that we have today it becomes Chrystal clear to me that these things were given to me by a loving and gracious God. He didn't owe me anything, and it wasn't something I earned.

I told you that God put a new job in my lap when I felt overwhelmed at my old one, but what I didn't tell you was that that new job was for less pay. I told you that we got a new house, but what I didn't tell you is that our new home is nicer than our old one. So to summarize.....we sold our old house because it created too much financial strain, I took a lower paying job because my old one was too much psychological strain, and then we bought a new house that was nicer, newer, and somehow more affordable than our old one. That doesn't make sense. That isn't something I can take credit for. That is God working in our lives and lavishing his love on us.

I look at my wife, and I know that I'm not the one that sustained her life and healed the trauma to her brain.

I look at my daughter and I know for sure that I'm not the one that knit her together.

I am where I am today and I have what I have because God carried me here and gave me these things.

Now comes the REALLY humbling part....

When I think about the Love God has shown me and the gifts he has given me I realize that not only did I not earn those things, but more than that I certainly don't deserve them. I'm not saying that in an attempt to be self-deprecating, but rather in an effort to be brutally honest.

I'm a sinner. Plain and simple. As a younger man I not only pursued sin, but I celebrated it. Now, God has worked on me some since then, but I still stumble. I still fall short. And the simple truth is that sin does not deserve reward. It is a debt. It requires a payment. A payment Jesus made for me with His own blood. And as if that wasn't enough, on top of that he's given me good things. I couldn't do enough good works in 100 lifetimes to deserve that.

God has used this realization in a really neat way to help me...

You see, I often struggle with feelings of frustration over things I see happening in the world. In particular when I see hostility toward or false claims about the Christian Faith. When I see those things my knee-jerk reaction is to get angry. I can feel my heart getting hard. I start to long for God's Justice. I find myself hoping that those people who say those things get what they deserve.

And then I'm reminded that if I'd gotten what I deserved my life would look very different than it currently does. I'm reminded that for every flaw I can identify in them I have one to match. And then something changes...God goes to work on my heart and instead of wanting those people to experience justice I find myself wanting them to experience what I've experienced....the amazing Grace of God. And the beauty of all of this is that I'm not in a position to dole out justice. So longing for it only leaves me feeling helpless and frustrated.... BUT I am in a position to show God's love. I am in a position to tell people about His Grace. This realization turns my frustration into motivation.

In closing I'd like to say that God has shown me the perfect picture of what it looks like to love someone who is undeserving. By showing me that, He has helped me understand that I need to do the same. That I need to love even the most unworthy person, and that I need to do that in a way that gives them a glimpse of Jesus.

So I just want to give God all of the glory for the way He's gone to work in my life. I hope that hearing this testimony is a blessing to all of you in some way. I also want to thank you for the love you've all shown to my family and I, and for giving me the opportunity to work with the youth in this church. We feel very welcome and we are excited to be here working to help build God's Kingdom.