

Close Calls

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty
Psalm 91:1

I've been a steady customer of Costco since the 80's, when it was Price Club. Because it's a no-frills warehouse the bargains abound, and I feel double blessed with one near home in Yorba Linda and another near work in Cypress. Often I go during my lunch break in the afternoon, though at this time of day it can be crowded, making up-close parking as rare as hen's teeth. So rather than waste time looking, I might automatically choose a rather remote place to park, while remembering to wear good walking shoes.

It was on one such visit to the Cypress store that I parked my car and trekked on foot down the parking lot aisle. Nearing the entrance, I passed behind the vehicles claiming the coveted close-up spots, and stepped behind one whose engine noise caught my attention. In a split second it lurched from its place, the driver obviously hadn't seen me in the rear view mirror. Nonetheless, it was on my radar, and this micro-millisecond warning primed me to jump out of the way. Still, my heart pounded from the adrenaline rush at missing an accident by the skin of my teeth.

Although I may want to credit my split-second response with the outcome, there have been other close calls where my actions had nothing to do with my deliverance from danger. I remember one such incident during my childhood in Redwood City, in a quiet suburb where all the kids routinely rode bicycles for hours unsupervised. This was in an age when helmets were unheard of, and I for one usually rode as fast as possible. Confident on a bike, I was fearless; moreover, we weren't in the habit of watching out for cars because the street wasn't a main thoroughfare.

Nonetheless, an enormous orange street sweeper coursed up and down the neighborhood periodically, and its presence didn't prompt in me any particular caution. In fact on one sweeping day I carelessly buzzed about the big orange monster while riding my bike and slammed into the side of its painted metal cab. The driver obviously hadn't seen me, so the machine kept running and proceeded to knock me down and around the huge hissing brushes. Though I might have easily been run over or crushed within the giant swirling brooms, somehow instead I was bounced clear of the sweeper into the street, unharmed. One boy nearby watched the whole thing and chastened me, then volunteered his commentary, "You could have been killed."

A silly youngster, I dismissed the incident as no harm no foul. Furthermore, my parents never found out about it and I saw no reason to tell them. But in reflective flashbacks over time that incite horror at my own foolishness, I marvel that I wasn't seriously injured or killed.

Though I certainly haven't skirted every possible mishap over the years, there's no way I'll credit random chance for certain curious escapes from harm. Rather, all-watching God, His hand on my life, no doubt intervened. Still, though heaven only knows the portfolio of every disaster from which I've been spared, there are few things more effective at capturing my attention than a near miss.

It's natural to wonder why God allows bad things to happen, but a near miss prompts the question, *why didn't* something bad happen? How can deliverance from danger be explained in spite of my reckless actions, such as inviting an encounter with a machine many times my weight that could have easily crushed me? The only answer that makes sense to me is the foundation of my eternal salvation, as someone once said, "But for the grace of God go I." And of course though His grace permeates my every moment, at times it has reached out and grabbed me by the neck.

Every event of life, like each hair on our head, is known and accounted for by God, therefore nothing forbidden by Him will ever happen to us. It doesn't mean we have license to be reckless because we're not to tempt the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:16). And it doesn't mean that bad things won't happen; rather, that even bad things can't separate us from His love (Romans 8:39). Therefore, true safety isn't physical immunity from danger, but keeping ourselves in the Love of God, where He wants us (Jude 1:21). This is where everything that befalls us goes hand in hand with the promise to be worked together for our good (Romans 8:28).

Furthermore, He promises not to allow more than we're able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). My memories of His past goodness reinforce the assurance of His steadfast present and future goodness. He permitted neither a car at Costco nor a street sweeper to harm me when I had no chapter and verse to claim that they wouldn't. Therefore, how much more can I trust His express promise to forbid a trial I can't handle?

Until our work is done on earth, nothing will take us away. After all, the multiple attempts to kill Jesus during His 3-year ministry weren't permitted (Luke 4:29-30, John 8:59, John 10:39) until the appointed time when the Father allowed wicked men to crucify the Son. Yet the lowest purpose of man couldn't thwart the highest purpose of God, to purchase our freedom from sin and condemnation. Moreover, after it was finished Christ was exalted above all (Philippians 2:10) and seated at the right hand of the Father. Only after this work was done did He leave the earth.

Likewise, after our work is finished we'll leave the earth too. But in the interim, as long as His purpose remains for us here, we're safe in the wings of the Almighty (Psalm 91:1). Yes, life may seem to hang by a thread, but the thread bound to eternal God remains secure and unbroken. We will be separated from this world someday, but never from His love (Romans 8:38-39).

Therefore, for those called by God and close to Him, is there really any such thing as a close call?