

SURPRISE ENDINGS *By Phil McKinnis*

Often we are unaware of what God is doing on our behalf, or on behalf of someone else we love. Difficult times often leave us feeling alone, abandoned, or even rejected. Yet God continues to work behind the scenes, very present, yet undetected. Our darkest times become our greatest miracles as God reveals Himself through acts of grace and providence. Surprisingly, and perhaps years later, we come to realize that God has somehow brought good out of a difficult situation (Romans 8:28).

For me, one such time came near 3:15 p.m. on the first Sunday in February 2011. I had recently become pastor of Healing Grace Church in Portland, Oregon, and we had just completed a leadership training class. A few people had already left the building, but most of us were still lingering in the sanctuary and enjoying each other's company, when the office phone rang. I asked someone close to the office to please answer it. The person on the line wanted to speak to a pastor so they brought me the phone.

The caller identified himself. He had randomly selected our phone number along with the numbers of three other churches out of the Yellow Pages. We were the only ones

who answered the phone. The gentleman was noticeably distressed. He often broke down weeping as he spoke. His life was falling apart and he needed someone to talk to – someone willing to listen and possibly help in some way. I knew it was not by chance that he called our number, but I did not understand the depths of God's involvement, or plan. Nevertheless I understood that it was a divine appointment orchestrated by God.

As we continued our conversation I wondered why a person not connected to a church would call a church for help. I wondered what past influences might have steered him in our direction. I discovered that his grandfather had been a minister. This appeared to be a factor in his seeking help from a church. As his story unfolded it turned out

that he had received Jesus as his personal Savior earlier in life, but had gotten discouraged and turned away from the Lord to a life in sin. The devastating circumstances now taking place in his life were helping him realize it was time for him to return to relationship with God – thus the real reason for the phone call.

I talked with him for quite a while on Sunday and then again on Monday after he left a distraught message on my phone asking me to please call right away. During both phone calls I had the opportunity to pray with him. On Tuesday I tried calling again. I got his answering machine so I left a message identifying myself by using my first and last name. On Wednesday he called me back, still distressed and struggling. About five minutes after telling me he didn't think God was hearing his prayers anymore, he told me that he used to have a foster parent with my last name but he knew it wasn't me because I wasn't old enough to be that person.



Phil McKinnis, a credentialed Open Bible minister, is the pastor of Healing Grace Church in Portland, Oregon. He enjoys spending time with his wife, Hafeeza, and his daughters, Chelsea and Kati.



Phil (on left) at age 4 and Guy at age 11



Phil and Guy today

Out of curiosity I asked him if he had any siblings. He said, "Yes, I have two sisters."

To his astonishment I named his two sisters, and then said with joy, "You are my brother!"

It turns out this man, who had randomly selected our phone number out of the Yellow Pages during a time we normally would not have been at the church, had been my foster brother, Guy, from the time I was two years old until I was six. The last time I had seen him was 32 years ago in a different state. God had been working behind the scenes, unknown to either of us, bringing about good. That following Sunday, my rediscovered brother, his girlfriend, and her son were all in church with us. It was a surprise ending and a wonderful homecoming.

