


Chapter Two



Turn Around, Try Again

A small church lost their minister. After his funeral, the finance committee voted to sell the parsonage and use the money to turn the church around. Literally.

Because of recent road expansion and highway right-of-way restrictions, the church's front porch pillars sat a few feet away from a major highway. On Sunday mornings, cars sped past on their way to the beach. For days afterwards, members of the grounds committee would pick up beer cans, trash and pieces of broken bottles. As a result, the Trustees Committee decided to jack up the church, spin it around and turn their backs to the traffic. A sound-barrier fence would be installed and trees, shrubs and a landscaped garden would serve to separate the church from the noise. They invested the \$30,000.00 from the sale of the parsonage into a certificate of deposit and began interviewing construction crews for the job.



In their spare time they advertised for a new minister.

Over the next few months, the interest-bearing certificate grew, while interest in the minister's position withered. Itinerant pastors came and went, some lasting months, others only weeks. Occasionally the church would find a likely candidate, but as soon as the prospective pastor met the staff and members of the congregation, he would withdraw his application. Even though they'd heard from other, more liberal churches, that women worked for less, the church never considered hiring a female minister.

In time, a construction crew was selected. The first team of workers arrived. So, too, did a young man responding to their ad for a new minister.

Peter and his family had just returned from the mission field. He was

seeking a quiet town near the coast in which to raise his family. Young, enthusiastic, and a student of the latest church trends, he eagerly accepted the pastor's position, even though the weekly salary was less than the financial support he'd received as a missionary.

"The Lord'll provide," Peter told the hiring committee. "He always has."

For the next few weeks Peter's family stayed in a local hotel. Once, he asked the church for a housing stipend but was told the money was needed for the "big move." At last, Peter found a two bed-room apartment across town. His wife took a part-time job. Peter applied for food stamps. The big day came and the construction crew lifted the church from its footings.

Peter preached, visited, cajoled and cared for his congregation, but no matter how hard he tried, he could not change their hearts or ways. Attendance dropped as older members died. Dust and dirt from the construction work discouraged visitors. Even when a new family stopped in, they were seated at the back of the church.

"It's quieter back here," they were told, "and this way, if you child starts crying you can exit without disrupting the rest of us."

Within days the church slowly turned away from the town. That same week, Peter received an email from a friend still in the mission field. The family needed money. Peter asked the church to sponsor the family for a year. The church said no. All their savings was tied up in the move.

"Besides, any money left over will go to buy a pipe organ. Our piano is out of tune and the choir has been after us for a long time to upgrade our music ministry."

"But I know these people. I served with them in China. They're doing a great work."

"If that's true," the chair of the finance committee said, "and I don't doubt that it is, then the Lord'll provide. Our job is to take care of our own flock and that's what we're going to do."

On the final day of the move a tropical storm blew up the coast. The ground, saturated by torrential rains, began to sink. So, too, did the jack stands. Peter left his apartment and drove across town, battling gale force winds, as he hurried to reach his office. He knew, given the cranky temperament of his congregation, that if he didn't place a message on the answering machine, he'd be blamed for not canceling the services. He pulled into the back

parking lot, which was now the front parking lot, just as a large oak crashed into the roof. The steeple tipped and snapped. Wind snatched it away, hurling it through the front window of a convenient store.



One side of the building sank, sliding off the stands and onto the soggy grass. Then, with the large oak serving as a battering ram, the church crumpled and collapsed. When the walls fell, the building settled into a hole and sank, becoming buried beneath limbs and trees.

Peter drove back to his apartment and told his family of the disaster. Then he called the chairman of the finance committee.

“Your church is gone,” Peter told him. “I am, too.”

“Gone? What do you mean?”

“My family and I are driving inland to get away from the storm. They say it’ll strengthen to a hurricane before it hits. Not sure how long we’ll—”

“I wasn’t asking about you, Pastor. I meant the church? You say it’s gone?”

“Flattened.”

“So what are we supposed to do, now?”

“That’s up to the congregation. Maybe you can appeal to the local community.”

“They don’t like us very much.”

“Insurance?”

“We let it lapse. Rates kept going up.”

“You could sell and build elsewhere.”

“We fought to keep the land around us zoned as non-commercial so we wouldn’t have to live next to a strip mall. Not sure we’ll get much help with the zoning board when it comes time to rebuild.”

“Then I’m not sure what to tell you, except what you’ve always told me.”

“What’s that?”

“The Lord’ll provide. Only next time, don’t turn your back on Him and those around you. It could be that in helping, going the extra mile, casting your net wide, you’ll find the provision you need... And the heart to help.”

GOD'S P R O V I \$ I O N

Read John 21:3-6

“I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered. He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.”

- 1) Do you believe God will provide for your daily needs? The needs of your church?

18) How does your church react to growth challenges? Is there a sense of harmony or disagreement?

19) Share your thoughts on giving generously. List five ways this congregation could have given to others then answer the question “Where does YOUR heart lie?”

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

20) When we place the needs of others above our own needs the rewards are great. List some ways God uses our efforts and how might His rewards be seen in us?