

CFAMC DEVOTIONAL PAGE
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Coincidence or God's Providence?
A deliverance in the life of David DeBoor Canfield

A previous Devotional Page that I did for members of CFAMC focused on a topic of a rather theological nature. For this month, I would like to take an entirely different approach—one that is an experiential testimony of God's grace in my life. In Scripture, there are both sorts of approaches represented, and sometimes juxtaposed to each other. Note, for instance the Apostle Peter's experiential testimony at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:6-11, one that is immediately followed by the theological confirmation of James in 15:13-21.

Thus will I relate one of the most amazing experiences in my entire life. In September of 2005, when I had begun the transition from retail to wholesale record sales, I drove in my van down to Galveston, TX, to pick up a large collection of records there. I left Bloomington on Wednesday, September 21st, and drove down to Texas, aware that a major storm named Hurricane Rita was approaching the area in which I was picking up the collection. I reasoned that since the hurricane was not supposed to strike land until Saturday morning, that I could easily load up the collection late Wednesday evening, stay at a hotel that evening and make my escape well in advance of the storm. I didn't count on the fact that about two million other people who lived in the area would be attempting to flee that same storm.

There were three significant "coincidences" that occurred to me on this one trip. These were, in my conviction were actually no such thing, but evidence of the hand of God upon me. The first occurred late Wednesday evening—I finished loading about 5500 records into my van around midnight that evening, and immediately headed over to the hotel at which I had a reservation. In these pre-GPS days, I had directions to the hotel, but somehow got confused as to which exit to take off of the main highway. Lacking any familiarity with the area, I finally pulled off one exit and parked in a large parking lot in order to call the hotel for better directions. When they gave them to me, I realized that the hotel I was staying at was on the opposite side of the very parking lot that I was sitting in: I looked up, and there it was! That was "coincidence" number one, but the least of the three.

After a night's sleep, I arose very early the next morning to get on the road back to Bloomington. I drove from Galveston up to Houston without any problem, and decided that going eastbound on I-10 would be the best route to get out of the area the most quickly, and drove about eight or ten miles before I ran into *the stopped line of traffic*. Both outgoing lanes on I-10 were at an absolute standstill, and even after sitting there an hour, I'd barely moved more than a few hundred feet—if that. Fortunately, so I thought, the standstill point I was at was near an exit, so I pulled out my atlas and found a back road going north that I thought would be unlikely to have much traffic on it. At that point, I was just interested in getting as far away from Houston, where Rita was expected to hit land, as fast as possible. My ploy worked—for about three to five miles. Then, I ran into the same kind of traffic jam that I'd run

into on the Interstate, except this time I was on a two-lane back road, which in some respects might have been worse. The pattern of “progress” along this road became apparent rather quickly: I would wait motionless for about 20 minutes. Then the traffic would move slowly for about an eighth to a quarter mile. Then it would stop completely again for another 20 minutes. Etc. Many, many *et ceteras*! After around eight hours of this, it sank in to me that I might not have enough gas in my van to get me out of the danger zone, even though I was turning off the engine every time I was stopped. The radio was giving many reports of gas stations running out of gasoline, and cars being stranded and abandoned along the side of the road for lack of fuel. Just about the point that I was beginning to despair of finding gas for my van (and having called back home to my wife to pray for me in that respect), I came around a bend in the road that had a gas station that was still open, and had gas for sale. There was a long line of cars waiting in the queue for fuel, and my prayer while I waited in that line was that the gas supply would not run out before I got up to the pump, and was able to fill up there. This was the second coincidence, since the route that I’d chosen at random through the back roads contained an open station. However, by this time, I was well into the late afternoon on Thursday, the 22nd, and Rita was predicted to arrive on Saturday morning, a little more than 24 hours hence.

I didn’t get even one wink of sleep Thursday, but drove according to the pattern described above throughout the entire night. The further I went, the more cars I saw abandoned along the road, apparently having run out of fuel. Finally, about 7:00 a.m. on Friday morning, the traffic jam broke. This was a full 24 hours after I’d left my hotel, and in that time, I’d managed to travel no more than 20 miles (and half of that distance was covered before I hit the traffic jams)! I’ve never welcomed an open road with such thankfulness in my entire life. By this point, virtually every business, gas station or otherwise, was closed in anticipation of Rita’s arrival. It was spooky seeing nothing at all open.

After traveling about 20 miles on this freely-moving road, I suddenly heard a loud “bang” and immediately realized that one of my back rear tires had blown out. The weight of all the records in the van (probably the greatest number I’d ever put into a van of that size) had probably combined with a worn tire to cause the blowout. My initial despair at that sound quickly vanished, however, when I looked to the side of the road to see, to my extreme amazement, that I was about to pull into the parking lot of a tire store, which was *open*! The blowout happened at the very moment that allowed me to pull my van directly into one of the bays without damaging unduly the tire that had blown out, or the rim that it was mounted on. I can honestly state that had the blowout occurred even a second or two earlier *or* later than it did, I would not have been able to drive directly into that bay. Despite this shop being one of the few places in the entire area that was open for business, they were able to put a new tire on my van without delay, and I was once again on my way. I also can honestly state that this tire store was the only such store I saw on my entire trip. I sincerely believe that God sent one of his angels to hold that tire together until I was in precisely the right spot for it to blow out in order to replace the tire and get out of harm’s way. I would have had to abandon my van had it not been for that open tire store. One does not ride out a hurricane in a van, even one loaded with heavy records!

So, was this a series of three coincidences? Most people would say “yes” to that, but I know better: I had an entire church (my wife Carole had spread the word to our congregation) praying for my safe extrication from a situation that I ought to have known better to get myself into. I’d had some hints of the possible problems in leaving as I was entering Houston on the way down, when I witnessed a major stream of traffic going in the opposite direction. The fact that it *was* moving led me to continue on my trip to Galveston, but I really acted foolishly to continue. God clearly had mercy on me despite my foolishness. To this day, I look back on this experience as an Ebenezer. In 1 Samuel 7, the prophet Samuel and the Israelites were attacked by the Philistines. Fearing for their lives, the Israelites implored Samuel to pray for them in the battle that was about to commence. Samuel offered a sacrifice to God, praying for his protection. God answered the prayer of Samuel, and caused the Philistines to suffer a major defeat. Upon the retreat of the Philistines, Scripture records, “Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the Lord has helped us’ ” (1 Samuel 7:12).

It is a privilege to have experienced the direct deliverance at the hand of God through this situation. God protects his people countless ways that they are never aware of, but for me to have witnessed his working for my protection in such an obvious way is something that I shall cherish to the end of my life—and beyond.