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Sudden Storm

FOCUSING IN

“For the first time in a long while I thought about God. . . . Was He real out here in the middle of a blizzard? Could He hear me now—and did He care?”

—Matt, age 14

A thick, gray fog hung over the valley below our log home that damp and dreary Sunday in March, but by midafternoon I needed some fresh air and exercise. So I pulled on my cowboy boots, reached for my down-filled parka, and headed for the back door.

“I’m going to split some wood,” I told my dad as I put on my cowboy hat. My words must have alerted Katie, our five-year-old springer spaniel, who seems to understand everything we say. She’d been sound asleep on a rug in front of the fireplace, but now she was at my side, wagging her tail and looking up at me pleadingly.

“Want to come along, girl?” I asked, knowing that was a stupid question. Katie liked a warm fire and often slept on my bed, but she was always ready for an outdoor adventure.

For the next hour, she sat patiently on the hillside, watching me split and stack firewood. “I’m almost done,” I told her. “Then

we'll go on a quick hike." A few minutes later, I whistled to her, and we were off—across the yard, over the barbed-wire fence, and down the hill to the pasture.

I love exploring the rugged area around our house in the Wildcat Hills of Nebraska's North Platte Valley. The rocky buttes and deep canyons are filled with all sorts of interesting stuff: animal bones, eagles' nests, even rattlesnakes and coyotes. But I've never been afraid of hiking around here alone. Growing up in a place like this makes a kid love the outdoors.

The wind blew through the tall pine trees, and the heavy air felt like it couldn't decide whether to rain or snow. Maybe we'd just go to the shooting range across the pasture and dig up some old shotgun shells. We wouldn't be far from home if the weather turned bad. Katie bounded ahead of me as if she knew right where we were going.

After we got to the range, I was busy digging in the soft dirt when a sudden cold breeze on the back of my neck startled me. Almost immediately I was surrounded by the thickest fog I'd ever seen.

We should get home, I thought.

"Katie!" I called, looking for a familiar landmark. But I couldn't see two feet in front of me. It was like being trapped inside a cloud. "I can find the way home," I kept telling myself as Katie and I walked up a hill. "I can do it."

The wind was blowing more fiercely, and rain began falling in huge, cold drops. I pulled a pair of thin gloves out of my pocket and shoved my hat down on my head.

Finally I reached the barbed-wire fence with relief—and then alarm. This was a three-strand fence. The fence around our property had four strands. There were no three-strand fences in our neighborhood. *We're lost!*

"Help!" I yelled as loudly as I could. Surely someone somewhere would hear me. We had neighbors to the north and west of our house, but the rest of the area was desolate. Was I near home or going in the opposite direction?

"Help!" I cried again. Katie cocked her head and looked at me. The rain started changing to sleet and then to wet flakes of snow.

"Let's go, Katie." I tried not to sound nervous. The sharp wind sliced through my clothes, and my teeth chattered.

I'd forgotten my watch, so I couldn't tell how long we'd been trudging up and down the hills, but the snow looked more like a blizzard now. Big flakes blew in my face. We were coming down a steep hill when suddenly, in front of me, I saw a dark shape—a log fence—and a cabin!

I bounded over the fence and up onto the porch, reached the door, and then stopped. It was padlocked. Peeking in the window, I saw a dusty old magazine on a table. This was someone's summer cabin.

For a moment, I considered breaking in. But that would be vandalism. *Probably the weather will clear soon and we'll find the way home if we just keep going*, I decided. The reasoning seemed logical. Even so, I felt more afraid than I'd ever been in my life.

I turned away from the cabin and set off in the other direction. Several minutes later I came across my own footprints in the snow. Katie and I had been walking in circles!

Just then Katie started sniffing the ground and disappearing in and out of the fog and snow. "Katie!" I yelled, my temper flaring as I ran and tackled her. "Don't leave me. You're all I've got!" She didn't squirm out of my grip. She just looked at me obediently, as if she understood. I buried my face in her soggy brown-and-white coat and cried. "I'm sorry, girl."

I felt totally helpless. For the first time in a long while, I thought about God. I'd always connected God to a Bible or a church, something real that I could see and touch. Was He *real* out here in the middle of a blizzard? Could He hear me now—and did He care?

"God," I prayed, "I'm afraid. Katie and I need You bad. Especially Katie. It's not her fault we're in this mess. Please take care of her."

I knelt there for a couple of minutes, hugging Katie. "I'll bet you're hungry and cold, too," I said, and suddenly remembered I had a cough drop. My fingers were so numb, I had to use my left hand to force my right hand into my jeans to get it. I bit the cough drop in two and gave half to Katie. For a moment, the menthol seemed to warm my mouth. Katie licked her lips.

"Let's go, girl," I said. As darkness descended, I thought of my mom and dad and two brothers at home. Surely they were worried about me by now.

Soon we came to another steep hill. My legs felt like heavy stumps as I climbed it. I sort of skidded down in one motion. At the bottom I slid right into a pool of standing water, hidden by snow and tall grass. For a moment I stood paralyzed as the icy water filled my boots and soaked me up to my knees. Katie jumped in and lapped up the water thirstily. I grabbed her by the collar and lifted her out. She could die if she got soaked and then chilled by the wind. We had to turn around.

As we climbed back up the hill, my legs cramped and my muscles felt as if they were tearing off the bones. The snow swirled into drifts around me. I felt heavy and weak. All I wanted to do was lie down and go to sleep. I spotted a pine tree with big, protective branches and crawled underneath. Katie laid her head on my chest. But after a while she started whining, nudging me in the face with her cold, wet nose. She wanted us to go on.

I felt kind of delirious, but said, "Okay, we'll try to keep going." Every step was an effort. Again I found a tree and crawled underneath, but now my whole body shivered so uncontrollably that I banged around on the cold, hard ground like a wooden puppet. Parts of me felt so strangely numb that I hardly cared.

Katie crawled in beside me. She was shivering, too, so I unzipped my down-filled parka, which was so wet that it stretched wildly out of shape, and I zipped us both into it. We must have warmed each other up, because soon Katie squirmed out of the parka and lay down at my feet. I looked up through the branches of the tree, thinking it must be nearly morning. "Please, God,"

I prayed, “no matter what happens to me, please protect Katie. I don’t want her to die.”

I couldn’t see God or hear Him, but I knew He was watching over us. I heard some coyotes off in the distance, but I wasn’t afraid. I fell asleep.

I don’t remember much else except struggling back to consciousness and seeing some daylight. Where was Katie? I looked in horror at a pile of snow under my feet. Was she frozen under there?

“Katie!” I shouted. Suddenly I heard a rustling sound on the hillside as she crawled back under the tree and licked my face. “Good girl,” I said, still feeling only half-conscious. Then I heard the sound of an airplane. I knew I had to get out into the open.

I concentrated to make my muscles work and slowly rolled out from under the tree. It had stopped snowing.

I tried to stand up but couldn’t, so I crawled toward an open field. I don’t know how long it took. I finally collapsed in the snow.

The next thing I heard was a muffled voice calling my name. I tried to respond.

“Katie . . . ,” I mumbled. “Is Katie okay?”

“Katie’s fine. She’s home, resting by the fireplace.” The voice was my mother’s. I was in a hospital bed. She and my father were telling me that rescuers in an airplane had spotted me a couple of miles from home about one o’clock that afternoon, facedown and motionless, with Katie by my side. My body temperature had dropped dangerously low in the night, when the windchill got below zero. They told me I was now in intensive care, being treated for frostbite and hypothermia.

“The doctor says it’s a miracle that you survived,” my mother said.

For the next few days in the hospital and then back home again sitting by the fire recovering with Katie, I thought a lot about the doctor’s words. I don’t know whether or not it was a miracle that I survived. What I do know is that I had another

friend besides Katie out there, and I never would have made it without Him. He's a friend who became real to me that night. A friend I'll keep for life.

—Matt Meyers



Young Believer Connection

Check out the character study of Elijah on page 471 of the *Young Believer Bible*. This man had to travel the wilderness often, but God took care of him—even dropping food by “raven post”!

READ: 1 Kings 17:1-7

Think about It!

In what areas of life do you need God's protection and help? Have you prayed about this?

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Out of Control

FOCUSING IN

"My life is my own; I am in control—or not."

—Mike, age 18

Snow flew high as the sharp, metallic edge of my board cut deep into the fresh powder of the virgin slope. Leaning into the turn, I sucked in the cold fresh air of the European Alps. The crystallized snow sparkled and danced as it reflected the setting sun. Only the swish of my board and the low whistle of the wind could be heard.

I'd been waiting all year for spring break. The snow was deep, the slopes fresh, and the usual crowd of annoying skiers . . . nonexistent! I was free, and I was invincible. I had been on a board for over five years, during which I'd developed my skills—and far too much confidence in my abilities.

During those few years my attitude had become, "My life is my own; I am in control." I took every opportunity to push the limits as far as possible. However, today I was to discover just how far those limits could be pushed.



Usually about half a day into a week of snowboarding, I find that the regular slopes become monotonous, and—as any decent snowboarder would—I begin searching for variants. The first couple of days were quite typical: steep mountain trails, sheer cliffs, light sprains, monstrous jumps—basically all the action you could take.

Then it happened: after stretching and straining to the maximum capacity, I pushed the limit too far. After exiting the gondola, I made up my mind to hike the rest of the way to the top of the mountain and carve some fresh powder before I met up with the main slope again. It was simple enough: if you don't like their trails, make your own.

So there I was, slicing up the new powder, reveling in self-confidence. I could see the slope, about eighty feet below me to my left. I eased the nose of my board down and began to plummet toward the slope, mentally planning the rest of my descent. Suddenly, the edge of my slope came into view, a sheer drop-off where it met the main slope. I knew I couldn't jump it since it would be a big drop before I slammed onto the totally flat, compacted snow of the main slope.

Instinct kicked in. I leaned and took a sharp right turn back up the hill. Tension released as I completed the turn a good three feet from the edge. But then my stomach lurched as that solid three feet of snow dropped away from beneath me, avalanching over the edge.



I was thrust into thin air. Who could guess what lay below me? I wondered what my dog was doing right then. Probably curled up in front of a warm fire in the dining room. With a rush, time resumed, and my chest slammed into the edge of the drop-off.

Desperately, I clawed at the edge, but my well-padded gloves hadn't been designed for cliff-hanging. Methodically I shoved the sharp edge of my board into the side of the cliff, knowing that—if it could catch—it would hold me suspended. But I was already moving too fast, and as my board glanced off the face I lost all balance and plunged backward in a reverse dive.

And then—darkness. I couldn't see a thing, I couldn't breathe. I also couldn't be dead; this was way too cold to be heaven. I tried to move but couldn't. Slowly my thoughts began to gather, and I remembered hitting the snow headfirst and catching a glimpse of the avalanche that had buried me instantly. It then occurred to me to move my legs, which caused my board to move. That was strange. Usually when a boarder slams, it's the board that gets stuck.

My head was also starting to ache from all the blood rushing to it. *Hey—I'm upside down!* My head, chest, and legs were buried deep beneath the snow, while my feet and snowboard stuck out. Thinking back, I realize the sight must have been quite comical, if not downright hilarious. But right then my mouth was too full of snow to laugh.

As I tried to dig the snow out from under my back to obtain a sitting position, I began to wonder why I felt no significant pain. I had fallen headfirst toward the hard-packed slope; I should be dead, or at least seriously injured. Then I recalled how the snow had given way beneath me and realized I had sent down a dump-truckload of the soft stuff, which accounted for the unusually gentle landing. Had I not landed directly on that soft snow, I'd have been a goner.



Silently, I praised God for sparing my life and then popped my head out of the snow to take in my surroundings. For the second time that day reality walked up and slapped me in the face. On

either side of where I sat, still half buried in snow, two large boulders jutted through the whiteness all around me.

At that moment, I realized just how much control over my life I really had—none. By all logical standards I should be dead, or in a wheelchair for the rest of my life. For the first time in my life I began to see and accept God’s sovereign hand on my life.

He is the one in control, whether I’m on my board—or sitting safe and dry by the fire, nursing a few monster bruises.

—Mike Walt



Young Believer Connection

Check out the character study of the apostle Paul on page 1437 of the *Young Believer Bible*. He survived a real catastrophe—a shipwreck and a poisonous snakebite!

READ: Acts 27:27–28:6

Think about It!

Recall the worst danger you’ve ever experienced. How was God there with you, protecting you? What did you learn?



Needing Help—But What Kind?

FOCUSING IN

“It’s amazing what kids will tell you if you make the *first* move.”

—Kurt, age 15

I know, Christians are supposed to encourage one another. But how exactly are you supposed to do that? Look, I’m only a fifteen-year-old guy, but I’ve spent a lot of time trying to scope this out. I mean, you want to help somebody, but how do you figure out what that person needs? You’ll understand what I mean when you hear my story.

I was six years old at the time, and here’s what I was thinking. . . .



My big brother, Kyle, has this thing called “lookeemya” or something. It hurts him a lot. It’s like his bones are falling apart, and his hair comes out from the medicine he gets. I feel sorry for him. I hear Mom and Dad crying for him at night. They think I’m asleep, but sometimes I start crying too.

One day Mom and Dad said I could help Kyle. They said I didn't have to. But I could decide on my own. See, my bones were good, and I could give Kyle some of my bones (like the inside part that makes blood), but only if I wanted to share.

At first I thought I would have to get sick too. But they said it would just hurt a little bit at the doctor's office in the hospital. So I said okay. And then I had to get a lot of shots—which really, *really* hurt. And then they made me go to sleep at the hospital, so I can't tell you what happened after that.

When I woke up, I had some bandages on, and I had to eat yucky food at the hospital for a whole day while they gave me some more blood. But everybody else was happy. They said it was a success, and Kyle would be better for a long time.

Okay, so I went back home. About a month later, Kyle came home too. He gave me this big hug. He still looked sick to me, without his hair and everything. But he smiled at me a lot.

He said he would take me to the park to look for frogs. And yesterday he did.



That was me way back then.

I think back, and I realize it was pretty easy to help Kyle because everybody told me it would be a good thing to do. They said how much it would help and everything. But nothing like that has ever happened again. I mean, nobody has walked up to me and said, "Hey, Kurt, here's exactly what you can do to make somebody's life a lot better."

So now I'm thinking it's mostly up to me to find out that kind of information on my own. I have to stay alert and look for opportunities to help people. Not like it's a big pain or anything. Actually, it's kind of fun. All I do is sit back and observe the people around me. For instance, maybe I'll be at a party where I'll see some kid who looks like he could be having more fun. If I

really watch, I might see something in his eyes that says he's just faking his smile or laughter. Maybe later I'll talk to him and say something like, "You know, I'm stressed out right now with school and work." (I don't make these things up, of course. If I'm stressed, I just say it.) That usually frees up the other person to talk about what's going on in his life.

It's amazing what kids will tell you if you make the first move like that—if you show you're ready to listen and care about them. I've had guys and girls tell me their problems, and I've always kept their secrets. And lots of times I've figured out how to help. But usually just being there for them is enough.

And believe me, this isn't something that can just happen between teens. Take what happened at my church, as an example. I met a lady there who has a rare bone disease. The pastor said we should pray for her because she was going in for a "marrow aspiration" (that's when they stick needles into your pelvic bones—about fifty times!—to remove blood from the inside). Anyway, I did my sit-back-and-observe thing for a while, and I could tell this lady was pretty scared about the whole thing. And she's not young, either. I mean, she is up there in age, like seventy or something. But you know she's human too, just like me.

So I went over to her after the church service, but at first I didn't know exactly what to say. So I smiled, and I even put my arm around her shoulders. (Can you believe that? Hey, I was just following my instincts at this point.) I said to her, "Mrs. Chetwood, I remember giving my bone marrow to my brother, and I want to let you know that everything turned out okay."

Now that wasn't much, I know. I don't even remember what she said back to me. But I remember there were tears in her eyes.

I really think I helped her.

I know it made me feel good.

—Kurt's story, as told by Ruth Reed



Young Believer Connection

Check out the character study of Joshua on page 280 of the *Young Believer Bible*. Joshua must have wondered how best to encourage his people as they faced battles with those already living in the Promised Land.

READ: Joshua 4:1-24

Think about It!

When was the last time you had an opportunity to encourage someone? What kind of response did you receive?