Why Me?

Three Tales of Danger

Incident One Gloria and I were traveling into Birmingham at 70 to 75 miles an hour. One solid lane of traffic to my left, two to my right. All moving too fast. All moving so fast that slowing down was dangerous and out of the question. I knew I could stay in the same lane all the way through downtown. Just another three or four miles.

And then there it was directly in front of me. It does not seem possible that so much went through my mind so quickly. My thoughts: Is that car stopped in the middle of my lane? No, no brake lights. But it is not moving. It is stopped. I’ll go left. Nope. Cars solid there. Right? Nope, more cars. This is going to be really bad. We’re going to die.

One last chance. I slammed on the brakes so hard I thought that my foot was going through the floor. Tires squealing. Keep the car in the lane. Must go from 75 to 0. We aren’t going to stop. Arch my back and press even harder on the brakes. The other car’s bumper getting closer and closer. We’re not going to make it.

We stopped five feet from the bumper. No time to rejoice. I am looking in the rear view mirror wondering if the car behind me can stop before it hits me. I can hear his brakes squealing. He stops. Barely. Maybe ten feet back.

The stopped car in front of us had two male passengers. They never turned around to look at us. Why were they stopped? Out of gas? No brake lights? Electrical failure? Motor blown up? Just seemed like a nice place to take a break?

The other three lanes are still going full blast toward Birmingham. Not slowing down at all. I look in the rear view mirror. Our lane is backed up as far as I can see. Then I saw a police car was coming up behind us, somehow weaving between lanes. He motioned at me to get over. But it was still impossible because the cars in the other lanes are still moving at 75. The police car cut into the left lane and angrily motioned me over.

I stepped on the gas. Moved over. Started forward. And am soon going 75 again. With all the other cars. My leg was sore. I was shaking a little. Gloria and held hands in the moving traffic and tried to breathe normally. Knowing how very close we were to disaster. Thankful to be alive.

Incident Two. Oak Mountain State Park. Family get together. Three cabins rented. Lots of hiking. Talking. Eating. Some fishing and canoeing. And the Park has lots of bike trails. And a Motocross Course. A race track five lanes wide for bikes. It starts at the top of a long ramp. First you go down the ramp then over hill after hill. Around the steep curves. Can you make your bike “catch air”? Who’s the fastest?

John, Mark, Elijah and Isaiah had gone on ahead. By the time I got to the Course, they had all mastered it. I decided to try a lap. Very slowly. I started down that first big ramp and realized that I would have to come off the brakes to get enough speed to go over the hills (moguls) at the bottom of the ramp. Off I went. Then a moment of terror. I would have to make the banked turn at the end of the first moguls. I made it. More moguls. Two more big curves. And I completed the course. It was the slowest speed in the history or motocross. But I finished it.

I didn’t see a lot of pride in my sons and grandsons’ eyes. So I did it again. Faster. Some of the family had walked over to watch from the bleachers. Sarah borrowed her brother’s bike and rode the course. Cheers from the bleachers. There were lots of laps and lots of laughter. Isaiah assured me that I never “got air”. He may be right. But I did finish several laps without major injury.

The walkers had started on back to the cottages to get supper ready. I finished one more lap and decided it was time to stop. To get off the course there was a small strip of pavement that curved to the outside roads. As I pedaled slowly around the curve I was smiling at the joy of the day. Of being with some my children and grandchildren. A contented smile. So glad I had this precious memory.

And then it happened. Very, very fast. As I pedaled around the curve, my back tire slipped off the edge of the pavement into a broken place. The tire froze. It was as if a giant had grabbed my bike and shoved me over. I went from gentle pedal to the asphalt flying toward my face. No reaction time. No time to move hands or feet. Only time to have two thoughts. First, there is nothing I can do to stop this. Second, I am going to slam face first into the asphalt, and it is really going to hurt.

And it did. We professional moto crossers call the maneuver I did a “face plant”. The first thing that hit the asphalt was my face. I lay very still for several moments. I let out a loud groan. I tried moving. I began to take inventory of my pains. Only then did I realize that my legs were still entangled in the fallen bike as were my arms. Lots of cuts and scrapes. Bruises. Lump on my forehead. My head hit so hard that I had whiplash. John heard and came to help me. It was a disaster.

Or almost was. I had on a helmet that took much of the impact to my head. The helmet was crushed and ruined. When me head hit it was almost off the other edge of the trail. If I had fallen an inch or two further over, the helmet would have been hanging in air off the edge and my face would have taken all the head damage. Guaranteed concussion and trip to the hospital. If not for John’s urging I would not have had that helmet on my head.

John helped me untangle. The bike was fine. I assured everybody that I was, too. Liar.

As I pushed the bike back to the cabin, I thought about how close I had been to disaster. Motocross course? No problem. Easy little path? Ouch. How quickly disaster can rush at us. I keep the broken helmet as a reminder of how close it was. How very close. Why me?

Incident Three. This one happened right here in Collinsville. I was driving out to the bank at the interstate. Left the church parking lot and took the right onto 68. I passed McClain’s and started through the half mile or so of curves. I got to that last curve where you can just begin to see the interstate. Little Wills Creek down the bank on my left. Tree covered hill/cliff on my right. I had been through there thousands of times. Just like most of you. Ho hum.

I noticed just a little movement on the hill. What’s that? Look how that tree is moving. The wind must be really picking up. Wow. Wait. Is just one tree moving? Is it falling? Impossible. But it is falling.

I slammed on the brakes as hard as I could. The tree was falling fast. It came straight toward the road. It was going to hit me. I pushed harder. The tires were squealing and burning. I didn’t think I was going to be able to stop.

The car came to a halt just as the tree hit the road. It was a thick pine. The main trunk stopped on the road directly in front of me. So close that the trunk went under the edge of the front bumper and broke part of it off. There was a large branch coming off of the main trump that landed on my front right fender. Left a huge dent as it broke on my car. My windows were open and the car had pine needles inside.

I sat still for a few seconds. Put the car in park. Got out and looked at it. I thought it was going to be totaled. Behind the car were the two black lines of rubber made by my tires stopping. The tree was blocking all of my lane and most of the next one. I looked at the car. Leaned on the car. I wondered if the car would move. So I got back in and put it in gear. I slowly backed up. A gentle thump as the front bumper came off of the main trunk.

I pulled into the left lane. And drove on to the bank. Made my deposit. My heart still going 320 million beats a minute. Five minutes later when I drove back toward the church, traffic was being directed around the tree one lane at a time. Chain saws were going at the tree. My town’s police were pretty impressive. I stopped to let Officer Ada know I was the one who had left the tire marks. She just shook her head at me. Told me I didn’t have to file an accident report. I drove to the mechanic. He looked it over and told me it was fine to drive. No major problems.

No major problems. I thought about how close it had been. What are the odds that a tree would fall on the road just at the exact moment a car was passing? My car. And what would have happened if the main trunk had hit the roof of the car? I later did the math. Traveling at the same speed and with the same stopping distance, the difference is one tenth of a second. One tenth of a second later and the tree would have crushed my car. With me in it. I don’t see how I could have survived without major injury. Or death.

Three terrifying events in six months. Why did these bad things happen? And why did I survive? What would you tell me?

1. Why me? Why do bad things happen to good people? Or any people? Many of you know my good friend Dale. He came into my office recently with a question about the virus. He had heard on the radio that God was punishing us with the virus. Dale asked, “John, is God doing this? Is He mad at us?” How would you answer? For me, a good answer would take a long time. I would want to use big words like theodicy. Do several Bible studies. But Dale only does short answers. So I gave my answer -- “No”. Good answer, right?

Jesus gave a better answer. He was asked about some people who had been tortured and killed. Did that happen because they were bigger sinners than everybody else? Was God zapping them because they were bad? Jesus gave an answer. “No.” Good answer, right? But Jesus added more. He mentioned some people killed in a recent building collapse. And Jesus said that they also were not bigger sinners. And then He added these words – “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Do you get the answer? He is saying that if God zapped all the bad people in the world, everybody would be dead. You and I are sinners. Quit trying to figure out if you are better than your neighbor. Instead, look at yourself. When bad things happen, be sure you don’t need to repent. Use bad things to draw closer to God. When bad things happen find ways to help hurting people. In the name of Jesus.

Here’s a simple answer to our question. To die because you get the Corona virus would be bad. But it would be much worse to get the Corona virus and die if you do not know Jesus. That would be a true tragedy. An eternal one.

We live in a fallen world that is marred by sin. In that sinful world, bad things happen. To everybody. Including Christians. The difference for Christians is that we stand in the middle of an epidemic and show the world that in our suffering we still believe. Because we know there is something more important than Corona virus. And we bear witness to it. All sinners. Some of us forgiven.

2. Why me? Why did I come through those three incidents almost unscathed? Did God give me that extra tenth of a second? Maybe. Good answer, right?

God sometimes intervenes in this fallen world. He sometimes answers our prayers with a yes. Sometimes with a no. Sometimes God cures His children. Works miracles. Sometimes He doesn’t. How often does He do this? We don’t know. Will He heal you if you get Corona virus? Maybe. When you became a Christian, you surrendered your life to God. If you get sick, He may have another plan for you and cure you. Or He may want you to serve Him in a sick bed. Showing the world your faith in a bad place.

Did He give me that extra tenth of a second so that the heaviest part of the tree would not fall on me? Maybe. I cannot answer for certain. But I do know this – that’s three mighty dangerous things that I came through almost unhurt. You can believe what you want. I believe He is not yet through with me in this world. I believe He gave me that tenth of a second. But even if I am wrong, I pray that I might be worthy of his grace as I continue to serve Him.

*Please read Luke 13:1-5 to see the answer Jesus gave to these questions.*

*And you might also like I John 1:5; I Corinthians 14:33; or III John 1:11*