

The Hedge

“The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.” —Psalm 34:7

It was one fine spring day in 1992 that the familiar truth of this verse became much more real to me. That was the day the enemy fired a two-ton missile at my family.

It was about one o'clock on a Friday afternoon as the children and I were just loading up the car in preparation to go to the home schooling seminar and curriculum fair in the town where we lived at that time. (Pam, my wife, was in another state to visit some dear Christian friends and attend the curriculum fair there.)

As Drew and I were putting some supplies in the car the other (then) four children were putting their things in order and gathering in the living room. Just then my elderly neighbor lost control of her car, and it shot rapidly, in reverse, across my front yard. I'll not soon forget that eternal moment in which I saw the car, out of human control and yet aimed with a menacing intelligence, shoot right toward the room where my children were gathering.

It wasn't just idling along, either. It was accelerating, as if the lady had mistakenly stomped on the gas instead of the brake, and then frozen in panic.

The full-sized car climbed the one step to the porch, another to floor level, then exploded through the living room wall right under the picture window. Wood splintered, glass shattered into a thousand pieces, and metal twisted and screamed with the impact. The heavy oak bench seat by the window, laden with boxes of books, was launched through the air, crashing into the cabinet on the opposite wall; fragments of the bench and front wall were hurled through the living room, through the door into the kitchen, stopping only upon impacting the sink, 25 feet from where they sat a split-second before. An interior wall with a reinforced corner stopped the motion of the car several feet into the house. The enemy seemed to have pulled out his big guns.

Real Attacks ... Real Protection

But “the angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.” Drew and I were in the driveway. Sarah and Laura had stepped back into their bedroom to get some things. Only Joanna and Seth (our two youngest at the time, 4 and 6) were actually in harms way. But the Lord held their hands. Joanna ended up by the smashed bench with only a red ear from some impact. Seth was hit in the forehead (probably by part of the bench). Neither was really hurt, just scared. The only “injury” was a cut on my hand from climbing rather hastily and carelessly through the debris to find the cause of the piercing screams that began an instant after the impact. I found

four panicked children huddled in a collective embrace in the hallway just off the living room. When I saw that no one was hurt, I quickly assured them all that everything was all right—we could fix the house. (The driver was dazed but not hurt at all.)

If the car had entered the house a foot or two over from where it did, it would not have stopped until it reached the kitchen, and one or two children would have been in its path. If all the children had been in the living room ... If Drew or I had been entering or leaving the room ... If ... It doesn't really matter. There are no "if"s with the Lord. He is in control; and he rescued us.

My first thought after calling the police ("I think we need some help") was to run find the camera. We had quite a scene around the place for a while: several police cars, fire trucks, a rescue truck and an ambulance, not to mention curious neighbors. I wanted to record the event on film so that my children would have a concrete "memorial" to God's gracious care for us ("Remember when the car came into our living room ... Wasn't God good to protect us from harm!")

What struck me in this incident was just how real is the attack on our families, and how real is the protection the Lord provides us.

In our church fellowship at that time we had seen many attacks in a short span of time: one family had a head-on collision in their car some months before (no serious injuries!); another had been to the emergency room three times in the past few months with injuries to children; another had children come within inches of being hit by a car while they were riding bikes, and this happened twice within a few minutes; another had a two year old wander out of the yard who was found twenty minutes later under the watchful eye of a caring neighbor (three or four blocks away!). What was striking in all of these incidents was how evident had been the Lord's protection. No one had been killed or permanently injured; in every case things could have been much worse. God had been our Protector!

We were soon to be reminded that the Lord, as Job discovered, does allow tragedies to occur for his own inscrutable purposes. Three months after the car violated our domestic tranquility one the members of our fellowship died in a one-car accident, leaving three children and a pregnant wife behind. Outside our church, but within our Christian home schooling circles, a mother of seven died of leukemia, and a father of four was killed while rock climbing on vacation.

Of course, just as real as the physical dangers that our families face are the spiritual dangers. The latter are even more serious since they have eternal, not merely temporal, consequences. We should let the visible threats remind us of those that are not visible. Scripture tells us that our true battles are against spiritual powers not against flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12), but our spiritual enemies often use temporal means in their effort to fight us.

Against both of these threats we fathers are especially called to take out stand. We are, on the human level, the guardians of our families. Just as we must protect them physically, so we must guard them spiritually.

Guarding Through Prayer

One thing the near-tragedy with my family taught me was the importance of praying daily for the Lord to protect my family. It is my job as priest of my household to intercede on their behalf.

My favorite biblical example of this is Job. We are told in Job 1:5, "Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them [his children], thinking, 'Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' This was Job's regular custom." He interceded daily before the Lord on behalf of his family. But his was no perfunctory prayer, "Bless my wife and kids. Amen." He took so seriously his role as family priest that he presumed to approach the Lord for forgiveness of his children's sins! Now we know that the children themselves must have sought forgiveness in order to be right with God, but can we doubt that God was at work in the children of a man who so sought the Lord on their behalf?

Confirmation of God's acting in response to Job's prayers comes in verse 10 of the same chapter. Here we find Satan presenting himself before God and being directed to consider the righteous man Job. Satan's response is instructive: "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?" Indeed Job and his family were under God's special protection, and Satan could not harm them, because God himself had erected a wall against those devices Satan might use to attack them. Surely we are meant to see a connection between Job's faithful daily prayers for his loved ones and the Lord's hedge of protection.

The most important work a man can do to protect his family is to prayer daily for the Lord to establish a hedge of protection around them all, guarding them physically as well as protecting them from the assaults of that "roaring lion" (1 Pet. 5:8) who wants to devour them. What an encouragement to realize that Satan and his minions have no power over our families except what our God allows! But how sobering to realize that God's maintenance of his protecting hedge may be directly connected with our faithfulness in prayer!

"Praying a hedge" is a concept firmly rooted in Scripture. Let's look at some of the biblical data. The term "hedge" itself simply means a wall or fence (Mk. 12:1), but this was often actually a thick hedge of vegetation, possibly thorns, which was placed to surround a vineyard or a sheep fold and served as an effective barrier against intruders. The term also is used metaphorically to refer to God's protection of his people: "Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled" (Is. 5:5).

From the standpoint of the one intent on doing evil the hedge acts as a barrier to prevent his progress. Israel found her way blocked up "with thornbushes" so that she was not able to fulfill her (spiritually) adulterous plans and was

driven back to her husband (the Lord; Hosea 2:5-7). Hedges block the progress of evil.

The agency of God's protecting hedge is often the work of angelic ministers. "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them" (Ps. 34:7). It was an angel who shut the mouths of the lions to prevent their harming Daniel in the lions' den (Dan. 6:22). "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14)

In praying for a hedge of protection we must remember that it is God doing the protecting, not our prayers. I am uncomfortable with the approach of those who directly challenge and rebuke demonic spirits. It seems safer to use the approach of the archangel Michael in his dispute with the devil. He said, simply, "The Lord rebuke you!" (Jude 9) Let us not become too focused on spirits, good or bad, but keep our attention on the Lord our God.

Another danger in this matter of praying a hedge is that we will come to see it as some kind of magical incantation. It is simply an exercise of a man's spiritual headship, as he appeals through his authority, the Lord Jesus Christ, to God for his protection. There is no "formula" to be used. God is not impressed with the outward form of our prayers; he is impressed with a man like Job who fears the Lord. More accurately yet, he is impressed with the intercession of Christ and the Holy Spirit on behalf of the man who prays (Rom. 8:26,27,34). We should simply entreat our Father with a genuine heart, knowing that he is pleased to hear and answer his children, whatever words they use.

At the same time, a man can do no better than to pray the words and thoughts of Scripture on behalf of those he loves. Jesus gave us a model prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. We should learn to meditate on the petitions given here and use them too to guide our prayers. Likewise, the apostles have left us with several prayers that we can use to guide our requests on behalf of our families. Examples of these are Ephesians 1:16-19 and 3:14-19 and Colossians 1:9-12.

In terms of the specific need for God's protection, we would do well to pray specifically that the name and the blood of Jesus would protect each family member. I believe I have prayed something similar to this every morning and night since that day I was so vividly reminded of its importance three years ago. Nor do we ever set out on a long trip in the family van without a prayer for the blessing of the Lord's protection. I am much more conscious that each day it is the Lord's decision to protect, or to allow injury to meet us for his own good purposes. I just want to be sure that I have done my part in keeping the wall in good repair. It is comforting to think of the angel of the Lord encamped around my home, or traveling with us down the highway. (Now I wonder ... Is it true that the angels jump off the car when you exceed 65 (or 55) mph?)

In all our prayers we need to remember that God is sovereign and will do as

he pleases. He is not a genie in the bottle who is obligated to do our will. We are his servants, he is not our servant. Times will come when the Lord allows sickness, loss and, of course, death. So we need to pray for protection, not out of fear and a sense of bargaining with God, but out of a sense of complete rest in his disposition of our lives. We ask for protection and know he hears and answers. But when his answer is to allow trouble, like Job we will say: the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Our good Father will see that all things work out for my good and the good of my family, in his own way.

I mentioned earlier the woman who died of leukemia and the man who was killed in a mountain-climbing accident—unmitigated tragedies both. Yet some months ago Pam and I received a wedding invitation that surprised and delighted us: the widowed spouses, who had not known each other before their losses, had been drawn together and were getting married. Their combined family now boasts 11 olive shoots, with a twelfth on the way! Truly God works in inscrutable ways.

So do your job and pray for the Protector to guard your family. Then rest assured that any harm he allows will be swallowed up in blessing later on, in eternity if not before.
