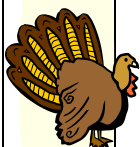
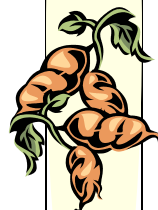


Seasonal Stories from the Family Farm

or



True Tales that Teach of God's Love and Provision

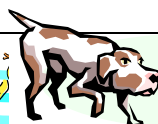
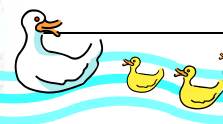


by
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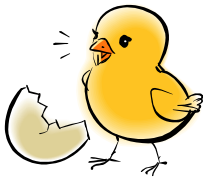




Spring - A New Start

1. Hatching chicks - A lesson in tough love!

One of the most common pictures that represent springtime is a newly-hatched baby chick, and we are all touched by that proof of new life and hope, and so much potential. Through the years we have watched spellbound as a tiny hole appears and begins to travel around the middle of the eggshell occasionally accompanied by a faint



"cheep, cheep"! Sometimes it really takes HOURS before the tiny chick pushes open the shell and lies exhausted, but victorious, as it dries out in the air and finally becomes recognizable as the adorable fluffy chick all the children clamor to hold!

At times it has become just too tempting to try to help by gently removing part of the shell - after all, we all want to help tiny weak babies! But we have learned sadly from experience that it's NOT a good idea - and in fact almost always leads to the chick dying!! The reality is that the baby chick's body must be stimulated by the effort of forcing its way out of the shell - otherwise it will actually not be strong enough to survive! It is a simple, but clear example of "tough love" which requires us to overcome our impatience and even our natural impulse to help!

But what an incredibly helpful lesson it is to bear in mind as we confront issues in our everyday life! "Tough love" requires a long-term viewpoint and a much wider perspective of the present need and situation, and it is tough whether we are the onlooker who has to hold back, or the one who is actually experiencing the struggle.

In the late spring of 1987 my husband and I moved onto our little farm in rural East Texas, along with our six young children. It was an exciting time of new life and hope, and so much potential - but just like a baby chick, we had to endure a great time of struggle before we could enjoy the blessings! But now as we look back, we can understand the importance of those tough times and realize how they not only made us stronger, but also prepared us for so much more that lay ahead in God's plan for us. I hope that by sharing some of those experiences here, you will also be blessed and encouraged!

2. Mum on a hot tin roof - And a flash of understanding!

When we moved to the farm we had a BIG vision but no money - so in fact made our home in the 40' x 8' railroad boxcar that was already on the property. We had to use the only water available which was in an old shallow well 250 yards away, and for the first few months even had to use a bucket to get the water out! We built an outhouse and outdoor shower, while "camping" in the boxcar throughout the summer as we slowly added on a small kitchen, living room and bathroom. It was tough, and a tight squeeze, especially when it rained - which it certainly DID, right after we moved in!

Previously we had seen no signs of the roof leaking, and so had focused first on putting a small window in each of the two main bedrooms, which were both packed tight with beds and the few pieces of furniture that we could cram in to hold clothes and all our other important belongings. The two big sliding doors gave us "front and back" doors, and the exposed rails across the curved wooden roof were perfect for holding coat hangers with all our clothes.

BUT when it suddenly rained 6 inches in one day, we found that the roof DID in fact leak - and quickly everything we owned (literally every STITCH of clothing and bedding!!) became soaked through! It was a disaster! We could only later dry everything out by draping the clothes over fences and bushes to dry in the sun - and no, I DIDN'T want to wash them all first in our only 5-gallon bucket!

We took important items to be dried in my parents' clothes drier in town, but Gerald and I decided the first thing we had to do was fix the roof! At first we tried with black tar and roofing material - but it just didn't work on the curved boxcar roof. There was no alternative - we had to build a new roof over the top! With very limited funds, it had to be a very basic tin roof.

God blessed us with a couple of weeks without rain and so we framed in the roof. Finally one afternoon we were actually able to start nailing down the sheets of tin - we would soon be able to relax again and not worry about the weather! But not long after we started, we were visited by the elderly couple who had sold us the

land. They had become friends and so we stopped work to talk with them and show them the progress we had made.

After some time, we happened to look up and noticed that the sky had suddenly become dark - another storm was threatening! We just **COULDN'T** let everything get soaked again, so we hastily said goodbye to our friends and got back to work. Gerald and I climbed up onto the roof again with more sheets of tin and started to hammer away furiously, trying to get as many sheets down as possible, but the storm kept coming. The rain began to come down in huge drops, but we were determined to continue on regardless and get the roof covered.

Then, as I was standing up on top of the roof holding another sheet of tin, a flash of lightning hit the hillside across the pond and I felt electricity travel through the tin in my hands!! At the same moment I suddenly remembered what my mother used to tell me: "Never stand in the middle of a field in a thunderstorm!" I realized that not only was I standing in a field in a thunderstorm - I was standing on **TOP** of a tin roof, and holding onto a long sheet of tin **IN A THUNDERSTORM!!!!**



I had a flash of understanding - rain coming through the roof again and soaking everything is **NOT** the worst thing that can happen! I yelled to Gerald and we both got down off the roof in a hurry and went inside to join the children. I don't remember how much it rained, but thankfully it didn't come through the roof any more and we were able to finish the new tin roof not long after.

But I had learned an important lesson - sometimes the circumstances we are in seem so desperate that we forget the risks we are taking! It's important to step back and get a better perspective on the whole situation. We have learned to depend on God and His protection and help, but we must also realize that we must not take it for granted as He also expects us to use our brains and not be stupid!

3. Blessings in the hedgerows - God's provision

That first year that we lived on the farm, we were only able to plant a small garden since it was already late in the season. The land had been used as pasture for years and needed a lot of work before it would be suitable for producing good vegetables, and we only had very basic gardening tools - meaning a shovel and hoe! We had not had time to learn which areas had the best soil etc, and had picked on a section that looked good to plant a potato patch. Alas, we learned that it was mostly clay and soon became boggy - and so our beautiful potato crop quickly turned into smelly, rotten mush!

But with eight hungry mouths to feed, we had no choice but to become foragers of the land! Late spring in Texas can be a time of great blessing for those who are less picky in their food and don't mind getting scratched! We quickly found that the abundant rain and sunshine had produced a bumper crop of blackberries and tiny wild plums along the fences and shoulders of the quiet dirt back-roads.



At every opportunity, we loaded up the kids in the back of the pick-up truck and went off, armed with buckets and some stout wooden sticks (to fend off any snakes!). It was a great way to provide an instantaneous fresh dessert and we usually brought home enough for me to make some jam or save some in the freezer. (If you haven't eaten frozen blackberries, you are missing nature's simplest and most delicious Popsicle!)

As the seasons passed, we learned to appreciate many other such blessings from nature's bounty, including wild passion fruit (sweet and tangy); crunchy huckleberries (better than the cultivated blueberries!); sweet and sticky persimmons (unless you get impatient and eat them BEFORE the frost, when they numb your mouth with their bitterness!); tart muscadine grapes, and rock-hard hickory nuts (delicious flavor but a pain to dig out their shell). The people at the local extension agency may have got tired of me taking in samples for them to identify as to whether or not they were edible, but we were always thankful that God was providing for us so abundantly!

4. Planting seeds - Vision and faith

In subsequent years, we learned to make an early start on planting in the spring - although this is actually a lot easier said than done! You have to start when the ground is hard and everything looks dead - and usually that means leaving the warmth indoors to face cold winds and back-breaking work! Of course nowadays most people expect to use a mechanized tiller which is certainly a HUGE blessing, but still a large part of gardening just comes down to plain old hard work!



Once the ground is prepared, the seeds must be set in place at the right depth and distance apart. That doesn't seem too bad as you make your way along the row - until you stop and look back to see how far you've come! It's always a great disappointment as you feel that surely you must have almost finished! It's often tempting to cheat and plant seeds closer together to get finished, but we've got to keep focused on the vision before us - a bountiful harvest!

Each and every seed has the same potential - but we don't know what lies ahead with weather, insects or disease, or many other unknown factors. So FAITH becomes an important part of our vision, along with the patient, hard work. It's no surprise that Jesus used so many examples of farming in the Bible - they truly are very accurate illustrations of our spiritual life, if we will just learn from them!

But after a few weeks, when we start to see little seedlings appearing bright green against the dark soil, we are again reminded of the sheer wonder of new life and growth! But now comes the need for more hard work if the crop is to survive - weeding and nurturing. The Parable of the Sower (in 3 of the 4 Gospels) holds so many powerful messages for us. We never know what problems may make a crop fail, so it's always wise to plant several different kinds. I recall one spring when EVERYTHING else failed except for white radishes, which somehow grew abundantly! I tried frying them, boiling, grating, mashing and roasting - but they always tasted just like RADISHES!

5. Daffy and Laffy - Sad reality

One spring Gerald finally gave in to the kids' impassioned pleas in the feed store, and bought two baby ducks. One was pale yellow and the other was black, and they were promptly named Daffy and Laffy. We set them up in a little cage in the barn, but it wasn't long before we discovered an important fact - ducks HAVE to have water to swim in! There's just something about the awful smell that they emit that lets you know they NEED to get to the pond! We tried, but a bowl of water just was no good, so we gently took them



out and led them down to the pond, about 200 yards away. They LOVED it and at once took off swimming - of course that meant we couldn't catch them again! We just had to leave them there and return home, trusting they would be alright.

As it started to get dark, one of the children ran in excitedly - apparently Daffy and Laffy had made their way across the pasture and back up to the barn! Sure enough, every morning they would take off one behind the other, and down they would go to the pond through the long grass. They happily spent the day on the pond and then made their way, one behind the other, back to the barn again before nightfall! It was a truly amazing sight!

Then one evening, after a few weeks, only Laffy returned to the barn! The children were heartbroken and wanted us to search the pond for Daffy. Of course we knew that "something" had got him and there was nothing we could do. We had a tough decision to make the next day, because of course Laffy wanted to continue his routine and return to the pond. We finally decided to just let nature take its course, so off he waddled all alone through the pasture. He actually made it another couple of days before he finally never returned.

It demonstrated a sad reality of life - we cannot control everything! Certainly we could have kept Laffy in his cage all alone and away from the pond, but that wasn't right either. Sometimes I

think we just have to let go, and be thankful for the good times we've had, and try to keep things in perspective - as God sees them!

6. Free sheep - God's blessing

Once, after we had had several different kinds of animals on the farm, we were offered two free "sheep". We only had to go into town and pick them up - although we actually didn't realize that would also involve spending a couple of hours chasing them around the backyard before we finally caught them and put them in the trailer! When we got them home, we discovered they were actually NOT sheep, but instead a type of Angora goat - which explained why they had been so difficult to catch! (As Jesus made so clear in Matthew 25 - there IS a difference between sheep and goats!)

At first they weren't any trouble, as there was plenty of vegetation for them to eat, and as winter came we had hay for them. But as the next spring approached and the hay ran out, we ended up having to buy feed for them, which we really couldn't afford. As time passed, we began to think of them more as a curse than blessing, but trusted that God knew what he was doing when He gave them to us.

That was in fact our final year on the farm before we went onto the mission field. We planned to leave in the summer, and needed to sell all our farm equipment and animals so that we could afford to attend language school for 9 months before we went on into Mexico. We knew we had heard clearly from God, and although we never actually advertised anything, God faithfully sent in buyers who paid good prices for what we had to sell!

But no-one seemed interested in the "sheep" and we began to get concerned - they really hadn't turned out to be much of a blessing! Then right before we had to leave, one of them had two babies (with all their wool it had been hard to know what sex they were!). Just a few days later, someone stopped buy and asked about them and we were able to sell them all for a good price! Once again God was showing us that He DOES have everything under control and knows exactly what He is doing!



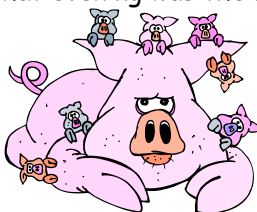
7. Stinky sloppy pigs - True beauty!



One spring our oldest daughter, Brandi, was in her senior year at high school and studying agriculture. As part of the course she decided to raise some pigs, and so spent several interesting months caring for them. Since she wanted her own car, she had to work in the evenings at the local pizza restaurant to earn money to pay for insurance and gas - but there was also the side benefit of leftover dough which she was able to bring home. It meant extra work and was often soured and sloppy but was greatly enjoyed by the pigs! She didn't win any prizes at the show, but we figured we could sell (or eat!) the pigs later, and finally Brandi was able to graduate.

After we all got home from the final day of school, it was a hectic rush to get the family and animals fed, and all the children bathed and ready to attend the graduation ceremony. As we hurried to finish up, the heavens opened and it POURED with rain! This meant that the graduation ceremony would have to be moved from the football field to the (smaller) school auditorium - we would have to really hurry if we were to get seats at all!

Just as we were about to leave, Brandi dashed out to check on her pigs, as we suspected that one was pregnant. She immediately returned elated that in spite of the storm, Momma Pig was actually giving birth at that very moment! Graduation or not, we all HAD to go view this marvel of nature!! We all ran across the muddy field and crammed inside the stinky shed. Sure enough, as Momma Pig lay on her side grunting, out would pop a tiny piglet, which would then wiggle until it broke free from its sack, boldly get up on its tiny legs and RUN alongside the momma's body until it found a nipple and immediately started to suck! We all watched in awe as one after another, almost a dozen perfect piglets came into the world! We DID make it in time for the graduation, but I think, for some of us, the most memorable part of that evening was the miracle of pigbirth!



Scripture references

Spring

1. A lesson in tough love

Hebrews 6:11-12 (NIV) - *We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

2. A flash of understanding

Proverbs 8:11 (NIV) - *For wisdom is more precious than rubies and nothing you desire can compete with her.*

3. God's provision

Matthew 6:31-33 (NLT) - *So don't worry about these things, saying, "What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?" These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your Heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.*

4. Vision and faith

Galatians 6:9 (NIV) - *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

5. Sad reality

Isaiah 64:8 (NIV) - *O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter. We are all the work of your hand.*

6. God's blessing

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) - *"For I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,"*

7. True beauty

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NIV) - *He has made everything beautiful in its time...*



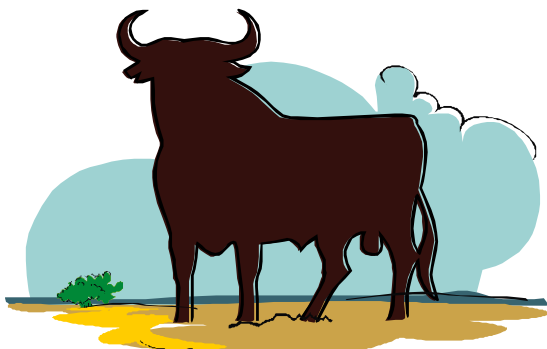
Summer - Growing.....

1. Bull in the potato patch - Righteous bravado

As mentioned earlier, because of moving to the farm in May, we got a late start on planting the garden. However we planted a potato patch just below the house and the plants were growing well by early summer. But then one day, it began to get hot in the house and so I opened up the big sliding "back" door. As I looked outside, I was horrified to see that the neighbor's huge black bull had broken through the fence and was proceeding to eat our potato plants!! I am not very fond of bulls at all, but I was determined he was NOT going to destroy our vegetables!!

Gerald was at work and so I told the children to stay in the house, then I grabbed the broom and ran out towards the bull. Fortunately I didn't have time to really think of what I was doing - after all, a 130lb red-haired woman against a 2,000lb bull doesn't have very good odds! But I waved the broom wildly and with righteous indignation I told that bull he had to leave our property in Jesus' name! Sure enough he took off running and I was able to get him back through the fence, which I then patched until Gerald could fix it properly later.

I didn't think a lot more of it until Gerald came home that night and our youngest daughter, Anna (who was only two and half years old at the time) ran to the door and greeted him proudly and excitedly with the words: "Momma chased off the bull with a sweep!"



2. Plum paradise - The joy of giving

The first year on the farm we became good friends with the family next door, up on the hill by the road. This was partly because for the first few months, our only water was from the old shallow well on the property, which was up by the road. Every other evening we spent two hours hauling water up in a bucket to fill a 55 gallon barrel and an old hot water heater, which we then took down to the house. Our neighbors, driven by curiosity, finally ventured out to ask us what we were doing, and so began the friendship.

However the following year they had financial problems and the bank repossessed their house. Not wanting to give the bank anything more than absolutely necessary, they dug up some small fruit trees (a plum, an apple and a peach) and gave them to us! Through the years, these trees grew and produced fruit that was a great blessing and much appreciated by us. One year a storm blew down a main branch of the plum tree; another year, suddenly half of it just broke and fell into the driveway; yet it just keeps growing back and producing delicious plums!



There have been some years when it has produced literally 3 or 4 bushels of beautiful plums. We would take buckets of them to give away at church each week; bless our neighbors and friends; and of course, make jam - one year I made 28 quarts! Even when we were away living in Mexico for several years, there were some wonderful plum harvests and a nearby friend unselfishly worked hard picking plums and making jam, which we then used to make jam tarts to offer in our Christian café ministry in Mexico!

What a perfect example it has been of the blessings and joy of giving, which continue to multiply and touch lives like ripples spreading out from a pebble thrown into a pond!

3. Scorching sun - Times of testing

But it would be wrong to think that farm life is always idyllic and fulfilling! As the book of Ecclesiastes clearly tells us in the Bible, there are good seasons and bad seasons. Farm life is undeniably connected to the different seasons - the seasons of the year and climate; the seasons of life through birth, growth and death; but also, SPIRITUAL seasons. In times of lack there is need of hope, patience, faith and endurance; and in times of plenty there is need of humility, self-control, thanksgiving and sharing. As the years have passed, we have learned one very definite truth - everything only lasts FOR A SEASON!

I remember one particular year when we planted our garden as usual during the spring, but that year we received NO RAIN AT ALL from February until August! Of course nobody knew that such a drought was happening. We all expected the rains to come "late" but without them most seeds never even germinated and those that did soon began to wither under the relentless summer sun.

We finally decided we needed to start to irrigate what was still surviving, and had to haul water up from the pond to do so. This was no easy task, as we had to load a big metal cattle feeder onto the trailer and then back it down into the pond. We baled water into it, and then had to drive gingerly back across the pasture to the garden spot, where we then baled the water out again and carefully watered the vegetables. We painstakingly did this every few days for a couple of weeks but the hot summer sun was just too much for the wilted garden - all was lost!

All, that is, except for a few straggly cucumber plants that somehow were surviving at one end of the barn, along the fence next to the turkey pen. We suddenly found that they were producing lots of cucumbers! Some were admittedly too fat and yellow, but under such conditions ANYTHING is welcome! I was able to make lots of cucumber salad as well as 18 jars



of pickles - which served as a reminder that God is still there, even through the times of testing!

4. Turtle soup - Persistence rewarded

I've often said that on the farm we enjoy a balanced diet of meat and vegetables - in the winter we live on meat and in the summer, vegetables! Of course nowadays having a freezer makes it a lot easier to store up vegetables to last through the winter; and refrigeration means animals can be butchered in the summer as well as the winter. But I remember one summer when our meat had run out and it had been some time since we had enjoyed "real meat" (meaning we had only eaten tuna fish and maybe some cheap wieners).

So Gerald took some of the children fishing to his mother's land, where there was a nice-sized pond. I stayed home with the younger children and eagerly anticipated cooking some fresh fish for supper. However as darkness came, I realized that Gerald could not have had much luck as he was obviously waiting as long as possible before returning. Sure enough at about 9pm he pulled up in the truck but he hadn't returned empty-handed. I held the flashlight as he showed us his "catch" in the pick-up bed. It was a huge turtle! He and the children had fished all day without catching anything, but just as they were leaving, they hooked the turtle. He saw my dubious expression and quickly encouraged me that there are several types of edible meat on a turtle and I could at least make some good soup.

He had decapitated the turtle before the trip back to ensure it was dead and the blood drained out, so then laid it over on its back



to remove the bottom shell. As I held the light, and the kids all held their breath in amazement, Gerald began to cut away the edible parts of meat from the less-desirable. He first removed the

guts, and then carefully cut the meat from the body and front legs. It was a tedious business and took almost an hour - yet the whole time the turtle's back legs kept moving as if to try to keep away the knife! Finally, even though only the back legs and tail remained attached to the shell, they continued to move around in a very

macabre way! Our supper late that night was definitely memorable - we haven't had to repeat it, but at least we didn't go hungry!

5. Winds of adversity - But the wind of the Spirit is greater!

Our farm is in a very small community, and since we had moved there from the town and were not related to anyone, we knew we would be considered outsiders for several years at least! Of course, having a large family and no money didn't help either, as we had to build our house very slowly, meanwhile living in rather unusual conditions! Even in the late 1980s it was still rather rare to find people with an outhouse as a toilet; hauling water from a well; bathing outside in a shower built from a cattle feeder tank with a shower head adjustment; and of course - living in a boxcar!



In fact it wasn't long before we started hearing rumors that neighbors had called the Child Welfare (or CPS) about us, saying our living conditions were unhygienic and unsuitable for children! For several months we spent many restless nights, knowing we could not move ahead any quicker with our plans unless the Lord blessed us. We knew the children were healthy and in no danger, and we had explained to them that it was just as though we were camping for the summer. We had faith that God was going to help us make the house bigger and more weatherproof before winter came, but virtually everyone else said we were crazy!

During that first summer, we got to know the family next door very well. They were church-going Christians but had problems because of having to care for a schizophrenic mother and sister in their home. Having been taught against the Holy Spirit, the woman (we'll call her Betsy) was very depressed as she was not helped by her church and had lost hope. As we talked, I prayed with her and shared encouraging scriptures. She had lots of questions and soon we began to study the Bible together. However when she started to tell her husband (John) about it all (especially about the power of the

Holy Spirit) he forbade her from coming to our house, although we still continued to meet in her house as the weeks went by.

When the children went back to school, I was left with just the youngest, Anna, at home during the day. One afternoon, a few days after Gerald had removed and burned an old tree stump on the edge of the hay meadow, I managed to get Anna to take a nap, while I wrote some letters. I just happened to glance out the open door as some strong gusts of wind blew, and I saw a fire starting around the old tree stump! The grass in the meadow was about knee high and ready to be cut and baled, so was quickly catching on fire as I watched in horror. We had already lost the earlier hay crop and so we desperately needed this one - I had to act fast!

We didn't have a telephone yet, so I just grabbed the broom and took off running and praying. By the time I got to it, the fire was starting to spread rapidly across the hayfield. I beat that broom hard, putting out the fire inch by inch. I knew the devil was trying to steal THIS hay too and I was determined he wasn't going to get it! As I extinguished the fire in one area, I would turn and start on another - I was making progress but because of the strong wind the



fire was definitely getting worse! I just kept on beating the broom with all my might, while at the same time shouting out "Devil, you've got to stop in Jesus' name! You are defeated! Get out of here in Jesus, name!...."

Suddenly I looked up and saw our neighbor, John, sprinting across the pasture with his broom too! He started beating out the fire and between the two of us, after about 30 minutes of hard work, it was out. He helped me throw buckets of water onto the stump to prevent any further trouble and then left without saying much. I thankfully returned to the house where Anna was still fast asleep! All I could do was praise God!

The next day I had a visit from Betsy. She was ecstatic! She said John had been asleep, but suddenly woke up and saw me fighting the fire. As he ran to help, he saw me thrashing that broom like Superwoman, and could hear me telling the devil to stop in Jesus' name. He said he had never heard such a voice of authority and it was obvious that God was helping me do the impossible!! He said he didn't understand any of this Holy Spirit stuff, but as far as he was

concerned, I could carry on doing bible study with his wife any time and anywhere I wanted! We never know how or when God will use us!

6. Tractor terror - God's protection

As the years passed and we were able to gradually get more farm equipment, Gerald was able to bale hay both for our own needs and for neighbors. I severely lack even any BASIC understanding of mechanics, but am willing to help him when I can, and so sometimes I would help by driving a tractor or even operating the rake.

One summer I remember that he had to bale hay in a field some distance away and needed my help to drive one of the tractors to the property. It was a huge (at least it seemed so to me!) red tractor which I had only driven once or twice before. He told me to just take it slowly and follow him. Being VERY aware of how much we were paying for this huge piece of mechanical equipment, I was nervous of making a mistake or damaging it, but I took a deep breath and prayed, and we set off.

I followed Gerald's tractor and bailer out of our driveway and up the little rise to the top of the hill. I noticed that our neighbor's hayfield in front of his house was perfect - tall, thick and ready to harvest. I hoped the hay Gerald was about to cut and bale would be as good. I gripped the tractor steering wheel firmly as I prepared to turn and follow Gerald down the side road, then suddenly, as my tractor came over the crest of the hill, I felt myself lift up slightly out of the seat and to my absolute horror, my hands followed suit - and the steering wheel came off completely!!

SHEER PANIC!! I had absolutely NO control over the tractor whatsoever and could only watch in terror as my tractor veered off the road, went through the ditch and ploughed right through the neighbor's beautiful hayfield! I screamed for Gerald while at the same time trying to remember if there was a brake or if I could change gear or something! Of course Gerald didn't hear me, but I believe God did! The hayfield went uphill slightly and so finally the tractor came to a stop. Sure enough about 10 minutes



later, Gerald realized I wasn't behind him and came back to find me - still shaking and holding the unattached steering wheel in my hands!

7. Crippled calf - God's healing power

For a while Gerald worked as manager of a local ranch, and one day he came across a young calf that had got away from the herd and been attacked by coyotes. It was torn open at the top of its leg and had obviously also broken its hip; so feeling sorry for it, he put it in the truck. He asked the ranch owner about taking it to the vet but was told not to bother - just to shoot it. Gerald didn't want to do that so asked if he could bring it home, which he was allowed to do.



We couldn't afford a vet, so just made the calf as comfortable as possible, poured some disinfecting medicine on its open wound and prayed for it. Every day we gave it feed, a pile of hay and some fresh water, but it really seemed a hopeless cause. The poor animal couldn't get up or move, so ended up in a stinking pile of messy, muddy hay, and its wound even started to have maggots in it! It was just so pitiful we could barely stand to think about it, but just didn't have the heart to kill it! We never did give it a name as we usually did for our animals as it didn't seem worth it.

The weeks gradually passed and its wound slowly healed. We kept trying to make it get up or move but it was now quite heavy and we couldn't budge it. Finally, one day Gerald said, that's enough! He opened the gate to the pasture and told the calf to get into the field or starve! For the next few days we tried to ignore it, and then one morning we discovered the calf had actually got up and was limping very slowly across the field! As the months passed the calf continued to grow and lived quite happily moving slowly around the pasture.

Some time later the neighbor put some cows into the field next door, and even though our crippled calf was scarred and lame, he was obviously very attracted to them, and managed to break down the fence! The neighbor wasn't too happy about his cows being bred by such a pitiful cripple, so we decided it was time to "move him on"! Gerald took him to a local packing house where he was converted into

packages of meat that lasted us for months! God had again turned something "worthless" into a real blessing!

Scripture references

Summer

1. Righteous bravado

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV) - *Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.*

2. The joy of giving

2 Corinthians 9:12 (NLT) - *So two good things will result from this ministry of giving - the needs of the believers will be met..., and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.*

3. Times of testing

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV) - *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

4. Persistence rewarded

Psalms 37:25 (NIV) - *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.*

5. But the wind of the Spirit is greater!

1 John 4:1 (NIV) - *You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*

6. God's protection

Joshua 1:9 (NLT) - *This is my command - be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.*

7. God's healing power

Ephesians 3:20 (NLT) - Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.



Autumn - Harvesting

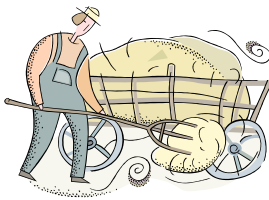
1. Happy hayrides - The work of our hands

The first summer at the farm we had several young calves and so we needed to bale hay for them for the winter. We employed a neighbor to cut and bale the early hay "on the half" (meaning he would receive half the bales for his work). But right after he cut it, his equipment broke down and we had weeks of heavy rain, so that by the time it could be baled it was just a big mess! When the second cutting was ready at the end of the summer, we still had no money to pay someone else to do it, so decided to do it ourselves.

We only had a tractor and a "bush-hog" (not the right type of mower for hay) but in the evenings after work, Gerald would mow a small section of the field. Then after it had dried in the sun for a day or so, while Gerald was at work and the other children at school, I would take Anna (not yet three years old) and a yard rake and walk out to that section and start raking it by hand into piles. For about 5 hours each day, I worked in the hot sun, eventually covering every inch of the eight or so acres of hayfield. Usually after an hour or so, Anna would get bored playing and want to use the bathroom or get something to eat so we'd have to make a quick trip back to the house.

Then after Gerald and the children came home, we would take the truck and trailer out into the field. I'd drive from one little hay pile to the next so that Gerald could use the pitchfork and throw the hay onto the trailer. Our six kids thought it was so much fun, sitting in the hay on the tail end of the trailer and bouncing across the field. Whenever we hit a big bump it would toss them up into the air or even off the trailer altogether! It was a GENUINE hay ride!

It was a lot of very hard work that lasted for about 10 days, but at the end of it, we had two big haystacks that fed our calves throughout the winter! God truly does bless the work of our hands - even if they have blisters!



2. Sweet potatoes and Ginger - Benefits of working together

Through the years we have had a wide variety of animals - some useful, but some NOT so useful! Furthermore, living on a farm with children means that EVERY animal must be named! We have had Daisy, the cow; Dolly, the goat; Tom, the turkey; Samson, the one-eyed Shetland pony; Gizmo, the cat; Ms. Ears, the donkey; Henny Penny, the chicken; Oink, the pig..... and I can think of numerous calves, rabbits, dogs, cats, horses and other animals whose names I've long forgotten - although I'm sure our children can remember them all still, even though they are now grown up and have their own children (and animals!).

But one of our most loved and well-remembered pets was named Ginger. She was partly dachshund and was given to Mark, our younger son, when he was in kindergarten. She lived to a ripe old age of about 15 and LOVED life on the farm! She went everywhere with



us and often as we were walking or picking blackberries, we would see the grass and weeds moving across the field, and there would be Ginger - not wanting to be left behind! When we planted seeds in the garden she would be there beside us watching but never getting in the way.

One autumn we went to dig up the sweet potatoes which had become overgrown with weeds and were hard to find, so it took us some time to find the first ones. Suddenly we heard a snuffling and scrabbling. We looked up and saw Ginger a few feet away, digging furiously. We thought she was chasing a mole or field rat, as she moved away quickly to another spot and started the snuffling again. We carried on and dug up a few sweet potatoes from the first plant, then gradually moved down the row. Then we saw it - a patch of ground cleared of weeds and with the dirt loosened to expose the next sweet potatoes! Ginger somehow knew exactly what we were

doing and wanted to help us with her sensitive nose and clever paws! With her help we dug up the whole crop in record time - and what a joy it was to have our faithful pet working together with us!

3. From a goat to a horse - Accomplishing a goal

Our oldest daughter, Brandi, was fourteen when we moved to the farm, and she had always wanted a horse. We knew we could not afford to buy one for her, so encouraged her to start with a smaller animal and learn to be responsible for it first. She managed to get a small job after school, washing dishes and earning \$1 an hour. After a couple of months she had saved \$40 - enough to buy a young goat.

We built a pen for it but she had to buy the feed and take care of it. Several months went by, and the goat survived and grew to be a nice-looking adult. Gerald did some mechanic work for a dairy farmer and was paid in baby calves, so after some discussion, Brandi sold her goat, and with some other money she'd saved, she was able to buy a calf from the same farmer. It was a lovely black heifer with a white mark on its forehead like a star, so she named it Midnight. As the months went by she took good care of it and it began to grow into a beautiful cow. Finally it was big enough to bring a good price - but unfortunately that is when the prices dropped dramatically.

Every night at bedtime I prayed with her that God would help her sell the heifer and enable her to buy a horse - but at that time horses were very costly. She began to lose hope and give up her dream. Finally one night she broke down and cried: "Why doesn't God answer my prayer?" I had no answer and could only encourage her that often we feel most ready to give up right before we see a breakthrough. She should just continue to believe God would answer.

The VERY NEXT DAY a man came to pick up his truck that Gerald had worked on, and as he was leaving, he caught sight of Midnight - and fell in love with her! He insisted on buying her - so we said that she was Brandi's and Brandi wanted to sell her to buy a horse. He immediately said he had a horse he would exchange for Midnight - and he finally even gave her a saddle and tack as well! Within an hour the trade was



completed, but about a year later the horse, Gloria, gave Brandi an extra unexpected blessing when she gave birth to a foal!! God is SO GOOD!

4. Fruitless fishing - When things go wrong



One time in autumn I remember, we were hungry for some meat. We had vegetables from the garden but again had run out of chickens and other meat in the freezer, and it was before hunting season started that year in Texas. One Saturday morning it was overcast and misting with light rain, and Gerald had had enough - he was determined to get some animal protein for his family! He decided to take the older children to the nearby lake and go fishing. We could not afford a fishing license for him, but at the time, children under 12 could fish without one, using a bamboo pole.

I decided to take the younger children to visit some elderly neighbors, and so after about 45 minutes or so, we were walking back down the road when we saw Gerald and the others returning. Maybe it was lack of faith, but instead of thinking "Oh, they must have caught something already", my response was "Uh-oh, now what's happened?"

Sure enough, they had returned empty-handed, and Gerald sadly told me the story. They had parked on a rarely traveled dirt road that crossed a backwater of the lake, and baited the poles. It was very foggy and they had seen no-one the whole way there. Gerald had to help the children cast their lines into the water, and was just doing so when a truck pulled up and a game-warden got out! Of course the fishing pole was undeniably in Gerald's hand and since he did not have a fishing license, the game-warden promptly wrote him out a ticket with a fine of \$60! There was no choice but to get back into the truck and return home - with the fishing poles and hooks not even wet! It was a bitter blow as I could only think of the many packages of fish I could buy at the grocery store for \$60!

Fortunately we were given a month to pay the fine, and obviously we did not starve for lack of protein, but it taught us all a good lesson - that, even when desperate, we should respect the laws of the land!

5. Homemade cheese - Hard work and a hard lesson!

For several years we had a milk cow - she was a lovely Jersey named Daisy. Milking her twice a day was definitely a chore, but she produced about 1.5 gallons a day of the most delicious creamy milk. Since the house was still small and we only had one old refrigerator, we had to pour the strained milk into a bowl each time after milking and let it cool. Before the next milking, I carefully scooped off the thick cream floating on the top and then bottled the milk. We piled whipped cream on top of every dessert, and I made butter, yoghurt, ice cream or cream cheese every few days. It was probably too much fat, but it was delicious and made up for other foods we couldn't buy.

We decided it would be good to be able to make hard cheese (like cheddar) that would store longer, and we eventually found a recipe that we could adapt to our humble surroundings. After heating the milk, adding rennet to form curds, then straining it, we had to put it in cheesecloth and place it in an old 3lb coffee can, which had had both ends removed. THEN came the tough part! It had to be left for a couple of weeks in a cool, dry place and with a weight pressing down on it. The weight had to be increased every few days in order to press the whey out of the curds and so produce good, hard cheese with an appetizing flavor.

Since we didn't have any actual weights, we had to improvise, and came up with things like an old flat-iron and some heavy metal awls (used to split wood) which we balanced one on top of the other! With all the children, it would be impossible to keep this contrivance inside the house, and so we decided to put it in the room at the end of the barn. Since it was in the autumn, we figured it would be cool enough. The days passed, and finally we removed the cheese from the metal coffee can - it had worked! It even LOOKED like cheddar! Now it just needed to dry out for another few days. A



couple of days later I went to check on it and realized I had forgotten one very important point - we weren't the only ones who liked cheese on the farm! A mouse had found it also and eaten a huge chunk out of it!

6. Thanksgiving wake-up call - God's help in time of need

Holidays on a farm are always different because the chores must go on regardless and the animals don't celebrate! One year this was made very clear to us one Thanksgiving. We had stayed in bed a little longer than usual, but as I got up and quickly dressed at 8.00am the phone suddenly rang. It was a neighbor who lived at the bottom of the hill below us; he asked if we had lost any pigs because there were some eating his pecans! At the time we did have three pigs, so I went outside to check. Sure enough, they were not in their pen - somehow they had escaped during the night!

I apologized and told him we would deal with it immediately, then I woke up the whole family to help - I knew it would not be easy! There was no way we would be able to load up three 200lb pigs into the back of the truck, and we didn't have a cattle trailer at the time. We would have to guide them back along the road somehow! We all grabbed some stout sticks and piled into the truck and drove out of our long driveway. As we went down the hill, we passed two or three horses coming up the road at full gallop - that was NOT a good sign! The road is a black-top "Farm-to-Market Road" and traffic often goes along it at 55 mph or more.

When we arrived at the neighbor's house we saw that the pigs had indeed frightened his horses so much that they had broken the fence! We started praying that they would not be hit by a car or harmed in any way. We all got out of the truck and Gerald ordered the children to stand in position close to the roadside. We gradually maneuvered the pigs through the fence and out to the road. Now we just had to get them up the hill, down the drive and back to the pen!

In case you have not had much experience with pigs, they are not like sheep or cows - they go only where they want to, and these were happily running from one side of the road to the other and

wanting to go off exploring into the bushes and fields. We tried to rattle feed in cans to entice them, but with so many exciting new foods like acorns and bushes along the roadside they weren't the slightest bit interested!

Our oldest daughter, Brandi, was still too young to drive but had been using the truck in the pasture sometimes, so Gerald told her to get in the truck and drive it slowly behind us all to slow down any traffic as we made our way back up the hill. As a mother, it was about all I could handle - I was SO afraid that a vehicle would come flying over the top of the hill at 60 mph and plough right into our family, which was spread out all across the road trying to drive the pigs up the hill! All I could do was pray and hold my breath as I tried to guide the children AND the pigs out of harm's way.

I just wish someone had had a camera and the time to take a picture as I'm sure it would have been a hilarious sight! Finally we made it into the entrance to our place and started down the 250 yd long driveway - but it wasn't much easier. We became aware of our dogs barking and of course they came running excitedly to meet us all, scaring the pigs again! The neighbor's horses had also come down our drive and had jumped the fence into the pasture where they were scaring the cows! It was pandemonium!

Finally we got the pigs back into their secured pen; then we rounded up the horses and took them back to the neighbor, and fixed the fence they had broken through. By the time we got through with everything and finally fixed breakfast, it was lunchtime - and only then did we remember that it was Thanksgiving Day!

Later I went to explain it all to my elderly parents, who lived in a mobile home half-way down our driveway. My father is deaf and so had heard nothing. Apparently he had opened the front door to go out and feed the wild birds just at the moment things began to happen. He watched in surprise as first some horses came galloping down the driveway chased by the dogs; then he saw the three pigs running by, chased by the children waving sticks and followed by Brandi driving the truck! Thanksgiving or not, it was just another crazy day on the farm! But we truly did give a special thanksgiving to God that year for protecting us all in a very definite time of need!



Scripture

references

Autumn

1. The work of our hands

Deuteronomy 28:1,8 (NIV) - *If you fully obey the Lord your God...the Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to.....*

2. Benefits of working together

Hebrews 10:24 (NLT) - *Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.*

3. Accomplishing a goal

Matthew 25:21 (NLT) - *His master was full of praise: "Well done, my good and faithful servant! You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!"*

4. When things go wrong

Romans 13:1 (NIV) - *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established....*

5. Hard work and a hard lesson!

Matthew 6:19,20 (NLT) - *Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven...*

6. God's help in time of need

Psalms 46:1 (NLT) - *God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.*



**Winter - "R and R"
(Repair and Rejoice)**

1. A vile pile! -

Delayed obedience is disobedience

Our eldest son, Leslie, loved living on the farm - but he was not one to jump up to do chores! In his early teens, he enjoyed going fishing and hunting, and helping his dad butcher chickens and pigs. Early one winter, we had a perfect cold snap and so Gerald butchered a pig. It was quite a long process outside in the cold, but then what followed in the kitchen took even longer! The meat had to be kept in a cooler with ice, until we could cut it up and package it for freezing. Gerald liked to make sausage with all the "bits", and grinding it all with an old-fashioned hand-grinder could take ANOTHER 6-8 hours!

It was almost dark when we remembered the big pile of skin and guts outside in the wheelbarrow. We usually took it down to the pond to feed the fish, so Gerald told Leslie to hurriedly do so before it got dark. We continued the laborious butchering process late into the night while the children went to bed. The next morning as the children were getting ready for school, I asked Leslie if he had emptied the wheelbarrow into the pond, and he replied "Yes".

They all went off to catch the bus, and a while later I went outside to feed the animals. As I turned the corner of the house, I almost fell into the wheelbarrow - and yes of course, it was still full of pig entrails and skin! The day had dawned sunny and it was already getting warm - I knew that pile of guts would soon start stinking! I was about to take it down to the pond myself when I realized that Leslie needed to learn a lesson - I would make him do it after school.

It actually got quite hot by late afternoon when the children returned home. Leslie came running into the house as usual, hungry for a snack. Again I asked him if he had emptied the wheelbarrow into the pond - and again he answered "Yes". So I took him outside and around the corner of the house - where he



was confronted by the evidence that proved him wrong! The heat of the day had made the pile of intestines swell like ghastly, stinking balloons, and now they were tripled in size and overflowing the wheelbarrow! That simple chore had now become a horrendous task that he would NEVER forget!

2. Acorn coffee - A test of endurance

During the first few years in particular on the farm, we literally had to "live off the land", as it takes several years to establish a good garden and our main focus had to be on building onto the boxcar and improving our living conditions. There was NO money at all for extras and we could only afford the most basic groceries - which did not include anything like soda or fruit juice. I remember one winter when we ran out of tea and coffee and could not afford to buy more for several weeks. Drinking only water is not too bad during the summer, but when it is very cold and you have to work outside quite a lot, it's hard not to want a nice hot drink to help warm up!

Being from England, I had been given a book by my parents on how to survive tough times, with old recipes from World War II. It included a recipe for making coffee from acorns, so finally Gerald and I decided to try it. After the older children went to school one frosty morning, I dressed Anna (3) in warm clothes and we went out about 8 am, across the field to the big oak tree to hunt for acorns. They were unfortunately of a very small variety, but we diligently searched among the fallen leaves and started collecting them in a bucket. It was bitterly cold but we were intent on our work - Anna was enjoying the "game" and I was dreaming of hot tasty coffee. Suddenly I became aware of a neighbor feeding his cows in the next field, and I realized how ridiculous we must look - picking up acorns on a frosty day so early in the morning!!



We took the bucket home, and then began the long, laborious task of cleaning, roasting, shelling, roasting, grinding, and more roasting. That night at last Gerald and I tried our first taste of hot acorn coffee: there was no doubt about it, it was

hot - but coffee it was NOT! Maybe the acorns weren't the right kind; maybe we did something wrong; maybe we just weren't desperate enough!! But we decided it just wasn't worth all the effort - not all "old-time recipes" are good! We realized we would do better not to complain, and just thank God for having WATER!

3. Frozen goat - Miraculous recovery!

Our first milk goat was named Dolly, as she had a very large "bag" (or udder). She took good care of her babies and produced good milk for us too. One winter we didn't realize how close to giving birth she was, and so one bitterly cold morning, I was surprised to find that she had given birth to twins during the night in the little shed. As we checked her and the babies we made an awful discovery. After giving birth, milk fills the nanny's bag and often causes it to swell and stretch the skin tightly. Now the weather in East Texas often changes unexpectedly, and the temperature can drop from 75°F one day to freezing the next. The freezing temperature had penetrated the thin skin and caused the bag and the milk inside to freeze solid!



I immediately took the twins inside the house to warm them and give them milk by a bottle, while Gerald worked on Dolly, bathing her bag with warm water to try to unfreeze it. We knew we could not afford to take her to the vet, but we knew she must be in a lot of pain, so we just prayed. We dissolved an aspirin in water for her to drink, and gradually thawed out her bag, but after a day or two it turned black - it looked terrible! I finally phoned the vet and asked his opinion, but he said the tissue must have been frost-bitten and dead, so she would probably never produce milk again.

The twins were far too lively to be in the house and wouldn't suck from the bottles properly, but we had an idea as we were still milking Daisy, our cow. Although her bag and nipples were huge in comparison, once the kid goats learned how to open their mouth wide to suck, they soon were happily nursing - as long as we held them up

off the ground so they could reach! They grew up strong and healthy; but one side of Dolly's bag became black and hard. Finally, a few months later, the black scar fell off leaving her looking normal again - and the next year we were all amazed when she had more babies and nursed them with no trouble at all! Truly a miracle!

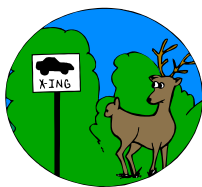
4. Dear deer! - An expensive blessing

When our younger son, Mark, was in college, he had a Camaro sports car. It was trendy but he realized that he really needed a pick-up truck instead. Gerald and I were missionaries in Mexico at the time, and came home for Christmas, so Gerald was able to help Mark find a suitable pick-up to buy. They closed the deal just before 5pm on the Friday and were able to stop by the insurance office to change the insurance coverage to the new vehicle.

The next evening we all went to a family gathering in another town and Mark proudly drove his "new" red pick-up. We stayed there late but Mark and his sister Anna left at 9pm to drive home. Knowing the danger of deer along the smaller roads, he decided to drive home down the highway instead of the little country road. But just before 10pm we got a phone call from him - they had had an accident!

As they were crossing the county line, a large deer had suddenly jumped out of the bushes and across the road - and hit the side of the pick-up truck! It bounced off the side, denting it in several places, before ending up in the ditch, and fortunately Mark was able to pull off the road safely. He called the authorities and had to wait a long time for the officer to arrive. When he did, he completed his report and told Mark he should claim on his insurance. Mark asked what he should do about the deer, and was told to take it home with him!

By the time we arrived home, Mark was already hanging up the deer to be gutted - and so we spent the rest of the night butchering it! The meat was a real blessing, and we were all SO thankful that Mark had been able to insure the pick-up the day before! He had to pay a lot for the deductible, so it was expensive venison, but when we looked at the damage on the



truck, we realized that if Mark had not changed vehicles, and had been driving the little Camaro, most likely both he and Anna would have been killed in the accident! We praise God for being in control of the whole situation and keeping our children safe!

5. Turkey tales - Long road to great rewards

It is said that turkeys are very hard to raise and we can certainly agree with that, but with a large family to feed at Thanksgiving and Christmas, we decided it was worth the trouble. But our first experience with these majestic birds quickly brought us back to reality! We bought an adult pair, Tom and Tomasina, and put them into their newly prepared pen - only to discover that it wasn't as secure as we had thought and the dog got in and attacked them! Tomasina disappeared across the fence; but Tom lost most of his body feathers, suffered a huge gash across his chest and ended up in the neighbor's pine tree for about 3 or 4 days!

We finally got him back in the secured pen and prayed that he would heal up, which he did very slowly. We thought Tomasina was dead until about 2 weeks later, when we discovered her coming down the fence-line, and managed to get her into the pen also. They finally recovered and even laid some eggs, which hatched into baby chicks, which was when we quickly learned they are indeed very different to chickens - baby chicks say "Cheep, cheep" and baby turkeys say "Peep, peep", but most notably, baby turkeys are STUPID! They can drown in their drinking water, and have a knack for getting stepped on by their parents - who are oblivious to the frantic peeping of their offspring trapped under their big feet!

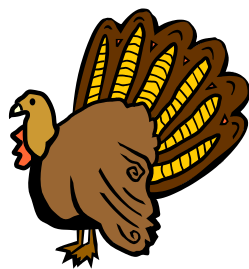
Several years went by before we began to learn how to avoid turkey problems, but that wasn't the end of our troubles! We decided to buy seven young turkeys from a friend. It was a Sunday afternoon and so we drove the pick-up truck to his place and loaded up the turkeys in cages in the back. At that time it was still legal for children to ride in the back of a pick-up truck, so the older ones did so while the youngest two sat inside the truck with Gerald and me.

We were nearly home when the heavens opened and it POURED with rain. We pulled over and let the other four children cram inside with us - squeezed tightly together and at least two layers deep, but we had only a mile or two to go. However, as we rounded the final curve by the house, we were stopped by a road block! A sheriff's deputy was stopping all vehicles (and there were VERY few in the rain!) and of course he stopped us. He looked inside our overflowing cab and asked how many people actually had seat belts on! Of course our explanation about the rain, turkeys and home up the road had no effect! He wrote us a ticket for not wearing seatbelts - so those turkeys ended up costing us over \$100 more!

Fortunately over the following year or two we learned how to successfully raise the baby turkeys away from their parents, and by the next winter we had raised 28 huge turkeys from eggs! When we butchered one for our Thanksgiving dinner, it was so huge we had to cut off its wings in order to get it into the oven! We had begun visiting the Mexican border every Christmas to help some missionary friends take clothes and toys etc to people in the slums across in Mexico. That year we decided to take some turkeys as well.

We butchered five of the biggest, cut off their breasts and then cooked and froze them. When we arrived at a little church in the slums across the border, we told them we wanted to help provide a meal for the people. We didn't have any money, but we gave them the turkey breasts. The pastor agreed to buy tortillas, and the women cooked tomatoes and chilies for sauce. Our missionary friend provided 5 gallons of Kool-Aid and a huge bag of candy, and we announced a special Christmas service, followed by the meal and gifts of the used clothing we had taken.

The church was tiny and had no electricity, so outside in the dark after the service we made all the children line up first, from youngest to oldest, followed by the teenagers and then the adults. One by one they went through the line, receiving a plate with a turkey taco, candy and cup of drink. Everyone got fed, and at the end we counted up and found that over 300 people had been blessed by that turkey feast! It had been a long and difficult journey since our first turkeys, but God had blessed our persistent efforts



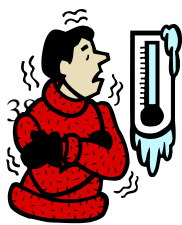
and enabled us to be a blessing to over 300 others!

6. From chaos to Christmas – The REAL blessing

As parents of a large family, preparing for Christmas can be very stressful especially when money is tight. We have never focused much on large or expensive gifts, but prefer to keep the emphasis on Jesus and the message of God's love and giving. Even today, we often make many of our gifts, and celebrate with a big family gathering and home-produced meal. Like most families, we have our share of memorable Christmases, but there is definitely one that stands out above all the others!

One Christmas season when we had been at the farm for 2 or 3 years, we just had three of the children actually living with us at the time. Gerald had been out of work for a few weeks, and so he was rebuilding some used bikes as gifts for the children, and I was making some other small gifts by hand. We had fattened up a turkey, and a neighbor had given us a load of turnip greens, so at least we had the makings of a Christmas dinner. Then a neighbor asked Gerald to accompany him on a long trip out of state to get some horses, and promised to pay him \$100. They would be gone for 3 days, returning on Christmas Eve - it seemed the answer to our prayers!

BUT - the very day Gerald left, the temperature began to plummet; by that night it was already below freezing, and still falling fast. We had added a living room, kitchen and bathroom onto the boxcar, but still had been unable to put in a ceiling, so there was just the tin roof between us and the bitterly cold night. We had a small old-fashioned box heater in the living room, so I kept it stoked with firewood, and the children and I slept next to it for warmth. I kept waking up during the night to put more wood in the fire and check that the tap was still dripping to prevent the pipes from freezing. Nevertheless, when I finally got up



around 7a.m., I realized that the pipes HAD frozen and in fact the thermometer showed the temperature as being 25°F INSIDE the living room!! It turned out to be a record freeze with temperatures reaching 10°F and the wind-chill making it even colder!

On investigation, I found that not only had the pipes frozen but also the well pump - that meant no water for us or the animals! The morning was spent filling containers with water from a kind neighbor, and trying to ensure the animals had drinking water and were as warm as possible. We had organized some baskets with fruit and food as gifts for elderly neighbors and planned to sing Christmas carols and deliver them that afternoon. However with the icy roads and bitter cold, no-one else wanted to go. Never being one to give up, I bundled up the children and proceeded to visit all the old people and distribute the Christmas cheer. It was a true blessing and even filled US with Christmas spirit in spite of the bleak circumstances!

The following day was tough as the cold continued, the pile of dirty clothes and dishes grew, and Christmas Day drew ever closer! Then came the morning of Christmas Eve: the sun came out, the temperature began to rise - and the water began to flow freely again from all the broken pipes! Thankfully Gerald arrived home, but was confronted with a seemingly impossible situation. In addition to having to butcher the turkey, cut down and decorate a tree, finish the bikes and other gifts, and prepare for Christmas Day just hours away, we now had to deal with a huge mess! We could only pray quickly for God's guidance, and plunge into all the work!

I drove straight into town to cash the \$100 check, pay bills, and buy pipe fittings and glue, some wrapping paper, and a few other needed items while Gerald started work on the pipes. Next was to tackle the pile of dirty clothes, wash dishes and clean the house, and decorate a tree! That night after the children went to bed to dream of waking up to presents on Christmas morning, Gerald and I worked feverishly to butcher and prepare the turkey, and complete and wrap the gifts. We finally finished, and collapsed exhausted into bed at 5a.m. - a mere 30 minutes before three excited children burst into our room wanting to unwrap their gifts! God had been faithful to us again, and what a wonderful Christmas that was! He had brought us from chaos to victory in just a few short hours and



enabled us to accomplish everything necessary to give our family a blessed and memorable Christmas! Truly, with God NOTHING is impossible and He has proven that to us countless times throughout the years on our little farm!

Scripture references

Winter

1. Delayed obedience is disobedience

Isaiah 1:19 (NIV) - *If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land.*

2. A test of endurance

Philippians 4:11-13 (NIV) - *...for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*

3. Miraculous recovery!

Luke 1:37 (NIV) - *For nothing is impossible with God.*

4. An expensive blessing

Psalms 91:9-11 (NIV) - *If you make the Most High your dwelling - even the Lord who is my refuge - then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent, for he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.*

5. Long road to great rewards

Psalms 32:8 (NIV) - *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.*

6. The REAL blessing

Psalms 103:17,18 (NIV) - *But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children - with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.*



Leslie and Gloria



Building the house



Ice



Gerald and snake

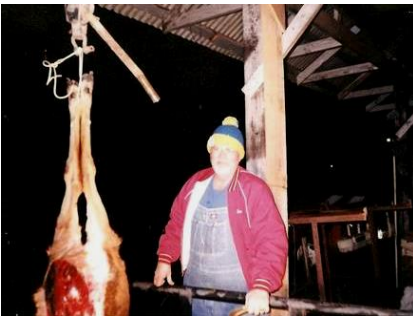


Mark up a tree



Anna, Dusti & Mark bathing

Family farm photos



Gerald and deer



Brandi and Gloria



Anna feeding calf

Shirley and Valentino

Harvesting hay