

Families That Thrive

By John Blackwell, Ph.D.

The Mountain

I went downstairs to make the coffee. I am usually the first one up. Nancy and Jaime had been asleep for only a few hours. They had driven a U-Haul truck from Phoenix to Salina, Kansas, with Jaime's furniture. Nancy and Jaime had arrived at 3 a.m. They had parked the U-Haul in our driveway. It was a large truck, and it towed a trailer, on which Jaime's car was mounted.

As I went downstairs, I looked out the window. I was shocked by what I saw. Sometime during the wee hours of the morning, the U-Haul had rolled backwards onto Santa Fe Avenue. Moreover, Santa Fe is one of the busiest streets in Salina. Granted, the traffic isn't nearly as busy as the traffic in other cities where we have lived; but by Salina standards, a large U-Haul sitting in the middle of a busy street wasn't what any of us would hope for.

Having no idea where the key to the truck was, I quickly went upstairs and said, "I hate to wake you two, but the U-Haul is in the middle of Santa Fe!"

Nancy and Jaime don't typically leap out of bed—not even if they have slept for twelve hours. But on this occasion, you'd think they were fire fighters responding to an alarm. The truth is that we were all alarmed.

Nancy quickly found the key, I quickly went to the street and started the truck, and I pulled it back into the driveway. I re-secured the parking brake, and we put bricks behind all wheels. Before long, Nancy and Jaime were back in bed.

You may notice that I said that I "re-secured" the parking brake. We later learned that the parking brake needed repair. Needless to say, this was a safety problem.

In our last newsletter, I said something about recognizing the difference between a mountain and a molehill. A large truck without a driver rolling into a busy thoroughfare is larger than a molehill. It may not be Mount Everest, but it is certainly big enough to merit attention.

There are molehills in our families, but there are also mountains. Mountains are the crises that inevitably face any family. Crises are just plain difficult. A crisis can give the impression of having a will of its own. We rarely feel in control during a crisis. We often have little control over events that erupt. Some crises are just plain awful, and they pose the all-important question, what do we do? How do we respond?

At the university where I serve, four students have lost family members during a ten-day period. One student lost her husband in an accident, one lost a sibling, one lost a best friend, and one lost an eleven-week-old baby. People were hit pretty hard. The service for the baby was here in Salina. I am proud to report that many students and faculty members attended the service. It wasn't easy for anyone.

The truth is that all of us face mountains from time to time. The question I want to address is what do we do when someone we love faces that mountain? What do we do when that truck is sitting in the thoroughfare of our lives—without brakes and without a driver?

St. Paul put forth an idea that is as profound as it is simple: Weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice. When the students suffered loss, there was

nothing we could do to prevent the loss. Nor was there anything we could do to pretend that the loss wasn't awful. It *was* awful, and nothing could change that.

I have a friend who lost both husband and daughter in a traffic accident that she survived. I remember her saying that the people who were the least helpful to her were those who came with their memorized scriptures, formulas, prescriptions, and conclusions. The ones who *were* helpful were those who were there with her, some of whom shared in her tears.

Sometimes, our loved ones face difficult situations. Some are crises. Rarely can we rescue people from a crisis. More rare still is our ability to prevent one. However, all of us want to be helpful. None of us wants to be useless. I know I don't.

I think that St. Paul recognized what we can do. We can weep with those who weep. We can celebrate with those who rejoice. I have a friend, Bruce, who likes the word *withing*. What he means is *being there*—being present during that inevitable crisis, giving kind support to the person facing that daunting mountain.

Dear Friend,

I would like for you to know two things about Families That Thrive. The first is that we are now going public with our web site. As we do so, we are going to do some of our newsletters in a "Dear Abby" format. I would love it if you would email me questions that you would like me to address in our FTT newsletters. I will do my best to tackle them faithfully.

The second has to do with income from our publications. We are giving all proceeds for student scholarships. Given this situation, we hope that you will purchase our books and give them to friends. We have a book on the Deadly Sin of Pride that is in production. It is due out during the spring of 2006. We also have a book on the Gospel of John and the rebirth of relationships that we anticipate releasing early in 2006. We hope that you will consider purchasing both. We are thrilled to be donating the monies for scholarships.