

# **More Miracles of South Carolina**

New Stories of Grace in the Palmetto State

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## Food for Thought

They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children.

Matthew 15:37–38, NIV

Ruth was standing at the kitchen stove looking at a pan when she sank to one of the lowest points in her life. This was in the early 1980s. Both she and her husband, Larry E. Boyd, were out of work and practically out of food. The family was having “a really, really hard time financially” when Ruth realized one day with rising panic, “There’s nothing here to feed my kids.”

The Boyds and their three children lived in an old but comfortable farmhouse in Greenwood County.

“We had no groceries in the house, nothing at all. I had tried to find something to cook for the children and I had tried to make gravy. I couldn’t even make gravy because I had nothing there. Nothing. I had tried literally with flour and water.

“We were really, really struggling. I had gotten to the bottom of the barrel. I can vividly remember there was nothing. Have you ever tried to make gravy with just flour and water and a little oil? I just couldn’t do it. I even added extra salt and pepper and it was just so pitiful I just took it off the burner. . . .”

Suddenly, while standing beside the stove, staring down at that pathetic pan, Ruth just couldn’t take it anymore. She had

to get out of the house. She needed some time away from the empty shelves. Her husband was gone at the moment to his mother's, so she gathered up the kids, locked the house, and the four of them went for a ride in the car. There behind the steering wheel she could at least cry in peace and watch the scenery out the window.

“And I just had myself a little pity party . . . rode around and talked to the Lord and told the Lord I just didn't know what to do. I can talk to the Lord in the car. Just get away and talk to the Lord.”

When she got back home and pulled into the driveway, her husband had not yet returned. Nobody but the kids knew how upset Ruth had been. The door was locked just as she had left it. But as they entered the house, Ruth encountered the surprise of her life.

“When I came home and opened the door and went in, *the whole counter was full of groceries*. There were groceries in the refrigerator. There were groceries in the pantry.

“I don't know if I even asked the Lord [for food]. I walked in and my kitchen was slap full of groceries!”

Shocked and overjoyed, Ruth remembers phoning Larry. “I said, ‘What happened?’ and he answered, ‘What do you mean?’ I replied, ‘There's groceries everywhere!’ Larry didn't know where the groceries had come from either.”

That night they all enjoyed a very thankful dinner.

Time moved on and the mystery lingered. For up to a year and a half the family did not have a clue as to what had happened. They pondered this great provision of groceries. The kitchen itself reminded them daily of something they could not explain. “And this was in a way a small miracle, but then in another way it was the greatest miracle that God could have given us at the time.”

How did the pantry get stocked? Eventually she found out.

One Sunday while sitting in their church, a lady had felt a strong inner command to supply Ruth and Larry with groceries. As she later told Ruth, “We had no idea” there was such a need. But the recurring notion would not go away.

By that Sunday afternoon, the church member felt so strongly about her God-appointed food mission that she enlisted the immediate help of her husband. They went to the store, bought a large amount of supplies, and arrived at the Boyd house—only to find it locked with nobody inside.

Urgency pressed the couple forward.

They said they didn't know what to do. They shouldn't leave all those groceries out in the yard. So the husband pushed the kitchen window up and hoisted his wife through the window and she opened the back door, which was right at the kitchen.

They hurried in with the bags and placed cold items in the refrigerator, then secured the door behind them. Satisfied that they had obeyed God's strong directive, they departed, not even leaving a note.

Ruth describes a later conversation with the woman: "The Lord verbally told her to bring me some groceries. She said, 'Ruth, I don't know why He laid it on my heart. I know now that you're telling me the story . . . but at the time I didn't know. He [God] just told me to take you groceries.'"

As much as anything, Ruth marvels that the ample food came precisely when she was out on the road with the kids, weeping and despairing.

"And to me, that was a miracle in itself. You know, I've prayed for my children's shoes before. I've prayed for sick people, I've seen sick people healed. I've seen tremendous miracles. But that, at the time, was the biggest miracle that I needed. I needed a way to feed my children and I had no way to feed them.

"All I remember is the large amount of groceries and wondering how in the world that lady knew, because I had never told her! The Lord has people He works through," says Ruth. "And I have seen this happen so many times before."

On an even deeper level, she wonders if the Almighty was really waiting on Ruth to cry out to him in abandonment. "Of course I depend totally on the Lord, but you know a lot of times we get away from things. We forget to be thankful."

Years passed and the Boyds had another reason to follow the path of faith. Roughly a decade later, in 1990, their house burned during the night, leaving only a claw-foot bathtub and a hand-made baby bed from England in its wake. Ruth has kept a home daycare business since 1971, and all of the notes for a book she planned to write about childcare were destroyed in that blaze. Larry had to break the bedroom window to get Ruth and himself out of the burning house, with no time to retrieve anything.

“We were both left here for a reason,” she says.

As they rebuilt the house, Ruth had a dream one night about a stained-glass window with a cross on it that would express thanks to God, reminding her always to be grateful for His mercy. She drew it on paper and then searched for an artist who could comprehend the concept and properly depict that image. “I traveled to two or three cities trying to get somebody to build this window for me, and nobody could grasp the concept.”

She finally heard of a lady in her hometown who built stained-glass windows. The artist invited Ruth to come by and see what they could come up with.

“When I arrived at her home, she had drawn that window *exactly like I saw in my dream*. I still look at that window . . . and I’m thankful every time I look up there, thankful that we are alive, because they told us we should have died in that fire.”

Ruth says she is a firm believer in God’s supernatural intervention. “There are large miracles. There are small miracles. There are miracles every day that we’re not thankful for.”

*Author’s note: At the time of this writing Ruth is chairperson of the Greenwood Family Child Care Network. She and her husband, now retired from full-time Army National Guard service, have eight grandchildren. Ruth’s visit to the Greenwood mall and, providentially, to my book signing was the first time in years that she had taken a day off by herself. Surely her story was meant to be told. Sadly, the Good Samaritan who brought her so many bags of groceries has since passed.*

## The Elevator Angel

This two-part story of grace is set in 1969. It involves a sickly newborn, two desperate parents separated by war, lots of praying people in Pickens, South Carolina, and an angel dressed in khaki pants and a short-sleeved shirt.

### Baby in Crisis

Dr. Jim Childs, who held a reserve commission, was ordered to ship out to Vietnam not long after completing his residency in general surgery at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond. When he left to serve in the U.S. Army Medical Corps in 1969, Jim and wife Anne already had one baby daughter, with another child on the way. Beforehand, Jim made out a will just in case he did not survive military duty. He also tape recorded a loving message to be presented to his children—once they were teenagers—should he die.

The new baby's birth was several months off, or so it was thought. That being the case, it was with joy, but also with some trepidation, that James Wesley Childs Jr. was received into the world—a mere month after his father's departure. The tiny boy was born almost two months early (4 pounds, 15½ ounces) at what was then the old Greenville General Hospital in the downtown Pendleton Street part of town.

After a good first week, the newborn slipped into danger. He developed a dreaded condition that very few infants—let alone preemies—survived: septicemia. As the baby's weight dropped, the news went out through the Red Cross to his fa-

ther on the other side of the globe. Aware of the seriousness of his boy's condition, Jim was extremely worried. In the late 1960s, there was no such thing as a neonatal intensive care unit at General or most anyplace else in the United States. Even with the best medical help of the day, which his son had, the boy probably would not live.

And to make matters worse, Anne was on bed rest herself. She was staying at her mother's home in Pickens with post-partum health problems. The young mother grieved for the little one's sickly condition. Because of his precarious health, she had not been allowed to hold him since birth. It was a dark time for everyone involved.

### Soldier Dad Pleads for Son's Life

Not so long ago, Jim reflected on that period. He wrote what it was like being in Vietnam while his wife, little daughter, and dying son were so far away: "Despite all my medical and surgical training, I felt completely helpless, being, as I was, on the other side of the world. I didn't know then, as I do now, that our God "is a very present help in time of trouble" (from Psalms 46:1, KJV).

After receiving word of his child's plight, Jim went at dusk to the base chapel, "a semi-tropical building with walls of part wood, part screen wire, and fell on my knees near the altar. I didn't know what else to do. I was alone in the chapel for a long time. I didn't know how my prayers would be received. I hadn't felt close to God for a long time. . . . I prayed for hours that night, pleading for the life of my son. I returned to my quarters around midnight with a heavy heart. I was awakened at 5 a.m. by the loudest noise I had ever heard. Our hospital compound was under attack with incoming mortar rounds, landing so close that the smell of cordite was in the air. As I hit the deck, I thought to myself: 'My son is dying and they're trying to kill me.'"

The next morning, the distraught father got a break. The Red Cross telephone line was available for once. It was usually crowded with soldiers. Thank God he could call home.

## Waiting for News

Meanwhile, back in Pickens, Anne's friends and family sat around her mother's kitchen table much of the afternoon. They were praying for the baby's life when Greenville pediatrician Dr. Jim F. Hicks called to say that James was "very, very sick."

Later that same night, the phone rang again with an even worse prognosis. "We were told that he was dying, there was nothing medical science could do to help him, and that he would probably not live through the night," says Anne.

That same evening, after everyone else had fallen exhausted into bed, "with tears streaming down my face, I released James to his Heavenly Father. . . . I spiritually laid my baby in the arms of God and told Him I put complete trust in Him to do what was best for us all. . . . I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep."

Around 2 a.m. Jim phoned from Vietnam to say he would seek permission to fly home. But then an odd thing happened. When his wife replied, she spoke not from the obvious facts of the situation, but from her innermost spirit. At the time, it seemed utter nonsense; and yet Anne's words poured forth. She told her husband that he did not need to come home because their son "*was fine, he was going to be all right!*" The conversation ended soon afterward.

Anne and Jim have never forgotten that prophetic moment.

Hearing those seemingly irrational words, Anne's mother flew downstairs and said breathlessly, "Why in the world did you do that, because the doctor told you he couldn't live till morning?"

To which Anne replied, 'I don't know! I have no earthly idea. I just *know* that he [James] is okay.'

After a seemingly endless night, Dr. Hicks called at 6 a.m. "Anne, I've got something to tell you."

"And I said, 'I know. *You're going to tell me he's okay.*' And Dr. Hicks said, 'How did you know that?' And I told him what had happened during the night."

Dr. Hicks wanted to know precisely what time Jim called the house from Southeast Asia. When told, the doctor was quiet

for a moment and then said, “Oh my, Anne. That was *the exact same time* that James turned from dying to health. We had given him up. This was done by a Higher Power than any kind of medicine.”

“And I said, ‘Well, I love you, Dr. Hicks, and I think you’re a wonderful doctor. But this was something I think God did,’ and he said, ‘Yes. No doubt about that. I’m just glad you realized it.’”

### Ordinary Man with Piercing Gaze

About one week after this turn for the better, Anne still could not hold the preemie due to hospital precautions. So her mother drove the new mom to glimpse her son through an observation window.

While there, both mother and daughter turned around and noticed a man standing against the wall of the wide, sprawling hall. He had one foot propped up and was leaning against the wall for support. Probably in his thirties, he had dark brown hair and was wearing khaki pants and a regular shirt with short sleeves. Nurses, doctors, and visitors walked back and forth in front of where he stationed himself, silently watching.

It was uncomfortable to maintain even glancing eye contact with the gentleman.

“When you looked at him, his eyes were absolutely boring right through you,” remembers Anne. “It was the strangest look I’ve ever had from anybody. I saw him and it scared me and I turned back around and Mother had done the same thing.”

They did not discuss the stranger at that time.

“He was just an average looking man. He did not smile. He had a very serious expression on his face. And when I turned and looked at him, his eyes were, just . . . I mean they came through you. I couldn’t tell you what color they were if you put a gun to my head. I just know that they were intense like I had never seen. My mother said the same thing. . . . He was looking straight at me, just through me,” says Anne.

After observing their preemie for a while, the mother and daughter started back down the hospital hall to go home. When

they moved away from the baby window, the man turned and followed. The two ladies arrived at the elevator and stood with a group of people waiting for the door to open. When it did, the elevator filled up quickly. The man got on along with the others. He stood in the back. Anne and her mother stayed near the door.

“We knew there was something totally different about this man,” says Anne.

The elevator did not stop, but descended several floors straight to the lobby. Anne and her mother were conscious of the man’s presence behind them the entire time. They wondered in silence who in the world he was. When they arrived at the lobby, they stepped out of the elevator. Logically, he would walk out too.

“We both turned to look—and he was not on it. Everybody got off and he did not,” says Anne. The elevator was empty. The wordless gentleman had just vanished.

Mother and daughter remained silent all the way down the hospital parking lot to the car. They sat there for a time, never speaking.

“Finally, my mother looked at me and said, ‘You know what that was?’ And I said, ‘I’m not sure, but did you see the man?’ She said, ‘That’s what I’m talking about.’ She said, ‘Anne, that was James’s angel. That had to have been an angel because he was with us . . . did you see his eyes?’ and I said, ‘Mother, his eyes went straight through me. You couldn’t really look at them.’ She said, ‘Exactly . . . I felt the strangest feeling, but it wasn’t fear, but I knew that he was following us . . . but he did not get out of that elevator.’”

Anne answered definitively: “No, Mother, he didn’t. Because I turned around to look and I did not see him get out either.”

Her mother agreed. “We have been blessed. We have been able to see the boy’s angel.”

*Author’s note: James grew up to be, in his mother’s words, “a healthy, wonderful young lawyer in Alabama and a dear Christian, does a lot of mission work, just precious.”*