

HAND ME MY TOOLBOX, I NEED HELP!



“Joe, are you sure you can rebuild the engine in time?”

My husband stared at me for several moments, took a deep breath, threw back his shoulder and grinned. “Just watch me!”

It was two weeks away from Redding's yearly drag races and the family racecar, Fierce Warrior, a 1967 Camaro, was tucked away in the garage with a blown motor needing a major overhaul. Rebuilding the engine was old hat for Joe, a mechanic for twenty years, but time itself was the real problem.

I had seen Joe's grin and cocky stance before when the odds were against him. They told me he meant business. I followed him to the garage. Randy, our son, had arrived to help. The two men were bent over the front fenders, heads under the hood, wrenches in hand, loosening nuts and bolts and taking off hoses.

“What can I do to help?” I asked.

Neither head popped up. “Keep the coffee hot and coming.” The hood seemed to have a voice of its own. Joe had placed the open toolbox next to the racecar for quick access. Over the next two weeks I watched him work feverishly using a variety of tools, wrenches, screwdrivers, pry bars, timing light, and etc. But I wasn't sure about Fierce Warrior. Could Joe really finish the car in time for the race? Would the motor start? How much longer could my husband burn the midnight oil without getting sick?

The night before the big race came, Randy hollered for me to come out to the garage. I joined them, as Joe made the last adjustment to the carburetor jets. He tossed the screwdriver aside saying, “I'm finished! It's Show time!”

Joe hopped into the driver's seat and turned the key. The air was charged with excitement! Randy and I crossed our fingers, took deep breaths and waited.

Fierce Warrior turned over a few times, coughed, and then died.

A frown creased Joe's brow as He pumped the gas pedal up and down. He again, quickly turned the key over in the ignition. The engine sputtered then caught hold. Fierce Warrior backfired several times belching forth blue-white clouds of smoke, then, roared like a lion.

Randy and I whooped for joy.

Joe grinned and gave the thumbs up sign as he continued to rev the engine. The RPM's tacked the red line, mufflers roared, and windows rattled. The noise was tremendous. Mixtures of gas fumes and smoke filled the garage. Randy and I collided in a mad dash to open the garage doors.

Morning came and my husband and son were up at 5 o'clock doing last minute trailer checks: airing tires, checking taillights, adjusting side mirrors and securing the tie downs on Fierce Warrior.

“I still can't believe you guys got the car ready in time,”

Joe grinned and pointed his finger up towards heaven. “We had lots of help!”

“Well, you made a believer out of me!” I said, “Now I can see why you bought all those new tools—you really did need them.”

“What? Am I hearing you right? Joe said. “Does that mean you won't holler at me the next time I buy a new tool?”

Grinning, I shoot back at him, “Don't push it!”

On the way to the races, I thought about Joe's tools and how each one was valuable in preparing for the race. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted a spiritual toolbox filled with God's tools for me. “Lord,” I prayed, “Help me start one, adding new tools as I have need.”

Then I heard deep within my spirit, “Child, you already have a toolbox. You've been filling it for years. Tools of prayer, praise, and worship. Tools love, promises, and comfort, and tools of fellowship, My Word and many more—when hardships come, they'll all be there.

Several years later Joe was told he had a serious heart and lung disease. He was in a battle for his life.

When Joe died my world crashed down around me. I felt so lost. We had shared forty-four years together and the reminders were everywhere; his coffee cup next to mine, toothbrushes hanging side by side, his and her bath towels on the rack, mementos, family pictures, Joe's Bible next to his chair, old love letters and the list goes on.

My sorrow and loneliness in the months after Joe's death drove me to my toolbox to comfort my aching heart. It hurt to see Joe's clothes hanging next to mine every morning when I opened the closet, but it also helped me adjust gradually to the fact that he was gone. He wasn't coming back.

I opened my toolbox daily. Without my spiritual tools, I don't know how I would have survived the “*alone*” times—praying alone, walks in the mall alone, and drives on familiar streets without Joe. Our special jokes, favorite foods and restaurants triggered painful memories, but the meals fixed for one, and the absence of shared laughter remains the hardest to bear. Psalm 23 remains my favorite nighttime spiritual tool.

Gone is Joe's loveable lopsided grin, the little “jig” he'd do when he was excited or happy, his wonderful sense of humor and booming laugh that brightened my day. Gone is the strength and comfort

of his arms. Silent are his spoken words “I love you.” Gone but never forgotten. They reside forever in my heart. This earthly world is not the end and I will see my beloved Joe again AND “God, thanks for my toolbox!”

PRAYER

Father, You saw Joe’s pain and exhaustion. A healing was not to be. So, wrapping Your loving arms around him, You whispered, “Son, come with Me. Time to go home, loved one are waiting.” With broken hearts and tearful eyes we watched you battle, suffer and die. We love you dearly and want you to stay, but we had to release you for the final decision was the Father’s way.

Your voice now stilled. Your heart stopped beating. Your grin we'll see no more. But when our days are sad—lonely, and everything seems to go wrong, we'll remember you dancing your Irish jig along with your encouraging “thumbs up” signs.

“Don't cry my loved ones!” we hear you say “Cheer up and carry on, my love is always with you and we'll meet another day.