

He is the God of Fire Extinguishers: A Story of God's Provision

by Jerry Williams, Providence Academy

We had everything worked out. At least, I thought we did. The plumbers had fixed the burst pipes in the used modular classrooms, which apparently had been sitting in Virginia with water in the pipes, and the preceding cold winter had taken its toll. And although the

“...for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” Matthew 6:8

Johnson City (Tennessee) Electric Department had said that it could be two to four weeks before our electricity would be hooked up, out of nowhere they showed up one morning and—we did indeed have electricity . . . finally. As I said, it was all coming together . . . and I thought we had everything worked out. Little did I know that God was about to make His presence known even more dramatically.

The setting was August 2000. Providence Academy (Johnson City, TN) was utilizing the facility at Mountain View Baptist Church on the Bristol Highway. We had been there since 1994. The problem was that we were running out of space. The church building also housed a daycare downstairs, and there simply weren't enough classrooms. We had already added a two-room modular building adjacent to the church for our first grade classes. Now we were adding a high school—and we simply needed more space.

I had found some used modular classrooms in Virginia that were

in relatively good condition. The problem was that Mountain View Church was located on city property, but the land adjacent to the church, where we would place the modular classrooms, was in the county. The city had already informed us it wouldn't work. There was a required setback of so many feet for the modular units; additionally, no one located on county property had ever been allowed to tap into the city water and sewer system—at least, not to this point. So, of course, we prayed. And after a lengthy visit with the property owners (which was made up of a group of brothers and sisters from Florida and Tennessee who had to be unanimous in their vote to allow us to use the property), *and* a city official, *and* a county official, *and* a representative from the church—what seemed to be impossible became a possibility because God, in His mercy, intervened. We were told we could set our modular classrooms on this *county* property and tap into the *city* sewer and water and that they'd even waive the setback requirement.

Like I said earlier, it was coming together. We had not expected to have to send the plans for the modular classrooms to Nashville to get them approved; but because they had been approved only for Virginia usage, we did. That threw us off schedule by about two months, but here we were in August, only a few days from the opening of the school year, and the modular classrooms had arrived, just prior to the start of faculty in-service. The classrooms sat at the top of the hill in the mud—with

no electricity, with broken pipes, with no steps or ramps for access into them, and no walkway, only mud, *but at least they were here.*

Faculty in-service began with an honest “Do you really believe they'll be ready before next Monday, the first day of school?” from the faculty. It didn't seem humanly possible. But, we had no other alternative. Remember, there was not adequate classroom space within the church building. The modular classrooms simply *had* to be ready by Monday. It sure didn't look promising, especially with the mud, and burst pipes, and no electricity. So, we circled up, joined hands, and asked God to intervene. Then we went about our business preparing for the upcoming school year and the students that would arrive the following Monday.

It didn't all happen at once, the way that God began to provide. But things did slowly begin to happen as we continued to pray, and we had no doubt that He was intervening. To borrow a line from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, “Aslan was on the move.” The plumbers showed up and solved our plumbing problems. Out of the blue, the electric company came and hooked up our power. One of the board members had a friend who said that he could come in and prepare the property around the units and even build our decks, stairs, and ramps—that week. It was all coming together.

On Wednesday I phoned the state fire marshal and asked him if he could come by on Friday to inspect the units and provide us with a certificate of occupancy. He chuckled. Really. You see, he had already driven by the property on the way to another job and

Jerry Williams is the school administrator at Providence Academy in Johnson City, Tennessee. Providence Academy is a charter member of ACCS.

He is the God of Fire Extinguishers . . .

saw our units sitting in the mud. He had concluded that a Friday visit would be a waste of his time because there was no way they would be ready. I assured him that it was all coming together. Although it wasn't ready right then, I was hopeful, prayerfully hopeful, that all would be ready when he showed up on Friday at 2:00 p.m. to inspect the units.

Thursday was a wonderful day. The plumbing was completed. We had running water. The excavation around the units was finished. Workers were throwing down grass seed and straw. We had electricity. The steps and decks were slowly being built. I scheduled the fire alarm people to come Friday morning, which I thought was the last piece needed before inspection. Indeed, it was all coming together.

The Friday of inspection is a day that I will remember for the rest of my life. As a faculty and administration we had met that morning to prepare for the day and to give God glory for His provisions to that point. There was still work to be done, but it was a beautiful sunny day and things were sure to be in order by the time the 2:00 inspection rolled around.

Feeling confident of this, I made my rounds and was eventually back at the school office. I sat down and looked at the clock. It was 12:00 noon. The fire marshal would be here in two hours. Were we ready? I thought we were. Then it hit me! If I could have seen myself from a distance, I surely would have seen my jaw dropped open, my shoulders slouched, and a general look of panic on my sullen face. I remember saying aloud, as I was the only person in the office: "Oh no! I forgot the fire extinguishers!"

Everything else was definitely coming together, but how in the world, knowing that the "fire" marshal was coming, did I forget that we'd *have* to have tested fire extinguishers in place, one in each room, before we'd ever be issued a certificate of occupancy? At this point in the story I'll simply ask you to pay close attention because what happened next is truly remarkable.

"Excuse me, is anyone in here?" came the voice from the office door.

"Yes," I replied. "How can I help you?" (I was still in a state of shock thinking about how I had forgotten the fire extinguishers.)

"I noticed that there is a school that meets in the building. Do you know where I could find a school official?"

"Well, I'm the school administrator," I said. "What can I do for you?"

"I was just curious—you don't happen to need any fire extinguishers, do you?"

Try, if you can, to imagine the shock that came over my face when asked this question. "As a matter of fact, I do," I replied. "How many do you have?"

"How many do you need?"

"Well, I need four."

"Perfect. That's exactly how many that I have in my truck."

I walked this man, whom I had never met before and have not seen since, up to the modular classrooms and instructed him where the fire extinguishers should go. He shared with me that he had finished work early on a Friday afternoon and was heading back to the office when he looked over his shoulder, while driving down the state highway in front of the church/school, and noticed the modular classrooms. He said that, out of the blue, he made a U-turn and proceeded up the drive to the school. I then

told him how I had forgotten the fire extinguishers and all that God had done for us that week. He informed me that he was a Christian, and we both smiled as we considered what God had done.

After this angel from God left, I went back to my office, put my head in my hands, prayed a short prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord, and then wept. I wept because I was overcome by the mercy of God. How could the God of the universe care about such small details? It was so apparent that HE all along had made sure we'd be ready for school to begin on Monday. And then at the end, just so Jerry Williams wouldn't somehow be tempted to try to get the glory, He stepped in and did something so incredible, and with such perfect timing (two hours before the fire marshal would arrive and thirty seconds after I realized that we had no fire extinguishers) so that He and He alone would get the glory.

This story, which we simply refer to as the "Fire Extinguisher Story," is a rock of remembrance we will continue to tell the students at Providence Academy so that they will see how that God is the provider and builder of our school. Matthew 6:8 says, "*. . . for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*" God cares about the formation of Christian schools. He cares about the classical Christian school movement. This attempt to repair the educational ruins in our country through the establishment of classical and Christ-centered schools is a work that God Himself is doing. He allows us to be a part of it, but He is our provider—and He shows His provision in different ways to each school. With us He happened to use fire extinguishers. With other schools He provides and

He is the God of Fire Extinguishers . . .

shows His hand differently.

The same is true of God's working in our individual lives. Philippians 1 reminds us "that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." What God has started He is able to complete. He sowed a seed of faith in our hearts, and He is able to keep us as His own. He is raising up Christian families that desire a Christian education for their children. God is responding to that need via the classical Christian school

movement. And sometimes it's nice to go back to those stones and remember how God has provided. This increases our faith so that we can, with confidence, continue forward to the task at hand.

By the way, the fire marshal showed up right on time at 2:00, and we were issued a certificate of occupancy. But before he arrived, God showed up right on time as well.

May God, the Lord of even fire extinguishers, be glorified!