

“Cool in the Furnace”

The 3 year old had never spoken so her parents were astounded when she said, “the soup is too hot.” They asked why he had never spoken? She answered, “up until now everything has been fine.”

But now it's 1:30am and our phone rings. Tricia answers it and the young man asks for Ryan. Tricia says that Ryan doesn't live here. The young man says that Ryan is at our house to pick up Sarah for a date. We go down to Sarah's room and she is gone. This was a jealous boyfriend alerting us to something we were not aware of. Up until now everything has been fine. Sarah was in Briarwood Christian school and although she had to study a lot more than her brother she was passing.

There is only one way into our neighborhood so I got in the car and went down to the entrance to do a stake out. At 5am I observed a motorcycle with 2 people on it pulling in. I followed them and they stopped about a block from our house. It was Ryan and Sarah. It's cool in the furnace.

This was a wake-up call in more ways than one. We took Sarah to Dr. Bill Krug, a fine Christian psychiatrist. One day as we left his office Sarah left us and walked into an attorney's office down the hall and interrupted the attorney in a meeting. She wanted to know how to be divorced from us.

Sarah became very quiet around us and when she did speak they were not pleasant words. She told us regularly that she wanted to leave us and be on her own at the age of 15. We found out that some of her friends were not the kind of people we wanted Sarah to associate with. We feared for her life and so we tapped her phone. Tricia and myself would argue about who was going to listen to the tape. Some good did come out of it.

One time we learned of a drug dealer coming from Atlanta to meet with Sarah. She went out the back door and we went out the front door and got to the rendezvous point just as the van drove by. Another time I followed Sarah who was going out with some friends. They stopped at a convenience store and I parked nearby. When I observed alcohol being loaded into the van I went over and made Sarah get out. She was very mad about that and I would have had to pull her out physically had her friends not been able to convince her to go with me. Tricia and I have experienced the death of many of our dreams and prayers for Sarah. Most of you can identify with this if not in your children, perhaps in your own life.

I heard 2 sermons this 1st year on the prodigal and I cried all the way through both sermons. Dr. David Jeremiah has said that no pain exceeds that of an anguished and heartbroken parent. I agree with that. It's cool in the furnace. I began to be a private detective and police man more than a dad and it was not fun. One night she wanted to go out and I said no. When she tried to leave and because she was putting up a pretty good fight, I told Tricia to call the police and they came in just a few minutes. As soon as they got here she sat down on the couch and was very cooperative. They gave her a good lecture and warned her they could put her in jail, but that if they did there were girls a lot tougher than her there and they would probably beat her up. After a few sessions with Dr. Krug he said that we needed to send her away. Tricia and I were dumbfounded. We said, “you mean there are places that will take a child like this?”

We decided to get a 2nd opinion so we went to Langston Haygood. After one

meeting he said the same thing.

Sarah spent several months at the Big Oak Ranch. It was a miracle that she got in because they normally don't take kids from homes like ours. They take children who are abused or neglected. In our case, we were the ones being abused. Mary, a young social worker there saw our tears and our desperation and helped make it happen. After a few months there Sarah began to have some mental problems they weren't equipped to deal with. We were able to get her in Shades Mountain Independent School. She was dismissed from there for doing drugs. We tried some other Christian Schools and no one would take her. We were lamenting this with our son Jason one day and he said, "Mom and Dad don't you see? The parents who send their kids to these schools don't want their children around kids like Sarah." It's cool in the furnace.

We took Sarah to Hidden Lake Academy in Dalonaga, Ga. We could not see her for the 1st 6 weeks. On the 6th week we went there for our 1st visit and got a motel room nearby. We got a call the next morning saying that Sarah had run away. They were following her in a van but their policy is that don't make a child go back if they don't want to. We talked her into going back to the campus and there they informed us that Sarah had to leave immediately. We had paid a good chunk of money because they said it would save us some money to pay ahead. We had not read the fine print of the contract because of our distress and they kept a lot of our money. It's cool in the furnace.

Their advice to us was to put her in a mental hospital nearby and we did. That was a big mistake. She was only there for the weekend, but the bill was about \$1,500 because they ran a bunch of psychological tests. If I had it to do over I would have slept in front of the motel room door. On Monday we headed across No. Ga. To No. Alabama- 3 Springs. This was to be her home for the next 18 months. She got a lot of help there and graduated from High School there. Ms. Warner was in charge of the boys and girls program there and was a Christian. Despite her busy schedule she spent one on one time with Sarah each week.

At this point Sarah is 18. Let's fast forward 8 years. We got a call from the police one evening saying we needed to come and get Sarah's car at the Summit near our house. The arresting officer said that he remembered Sarah from 11 years earlier. He was one of the officers who had come to our house the night Sarah was trying to get out of the house. It's cool in the furnace.

Daniel 3: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down and worship an idol. These were friends of Daniel. The king got wind of this and he was not a happy camper. We pickup at verse 13-30 Verse 25 What did he see? Who was this 4th person? Note verse 27. Tricia and I can testify that not a hair on our head has been singed, neither is there the smell of smoke on our garments. We're still in the furnace, but it's cool. What do I mean by that?

God has used this experience to deepen our faith and our prayer lives. We have turned to God in prayer much more than had we not had this trial. Although we have shed many tears we have received God's comfort and the encouragement of our friends. God has brought people to us who have prodigals and we have been able to minister to them, so it has expanded our usefulness. God had used it to humble us.

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Sarah spent about a year at Lovelady Treatment Center located at the former East End Hospital. The first time she went they made her leave when drugs were found in her purse. She was court-ordered back and the 2nd time she began cooperating. She worked in the day care center taking care of 2 year olds. Sarah is very gifted in caring for children and she did a great job. She graduated from

the program after 6 months and continued to live there. The director and her daughter each with 3 children asked Sarah to be the nanny to their children. Several were doing poorly in school and Sarah was able to help them get their grades back up. Next they asked her to back to the day care center as co-director. She did fine in this position, but because of the bad economy they were forced to lay off 80 people in the center. They told Sarah that many of the girls there had no support from home but she did and that is why she was selected to be one of the ones laid off. She has a good attitude about it and plans to go back to UAB to finish her degree. She can do that in about a year. Sarah is back home with us while she goes back to school. She has been drug free for a year. We are very thankful for God answering our prayers. We are claiming Jeremiah 29:11 for Sarah.