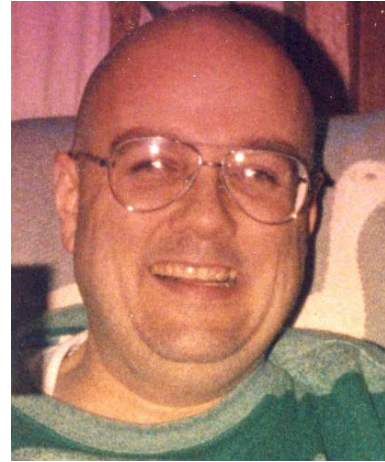


My Most Amazing Day — My 40th Birthday (He's a Real No-Hair Man)

In 1989, Belmont Church's pastor, Don Finto, heard God say that he was to "place the leadership of the church in the hands of younger men in whom he saw the fire of God". So he began to watch for God to point out those men to him.

Shortly thereafter, the existing Belmont Church elders called me in, along with several other men, for a meeting at which they asked us to consider joining the eldership. The others included Phil Kendrick, David Hooper, Mike McNally, Richard Curtis, Andy Reese, and Mike Bouldin. They asked us to pray about it and let them know what we felt we were hearing from God. So I began to pray about whether I should join the eldership of Belmont Church.



I asked Rosie to pray for me about it as well, as there would undoubtedly be ramifications for our family life.

Soon I felt like I had an answer from God. But it was not the kind of answer I was expecting – not a simple yes or no. I felt that God was saying, "You may join the eldership, but not until after your 40th birthday". That seemed very odd to me for a couple of reasons. First, He didn't seem to be saying that I should or shouldn't join the eldership, but that I could. And secondly, He indicated that it was important that I wait until after my 40th birthday, January 11, 1990, which was still several months away. I was puzzled, to say the least.

As the months went by, I had the growing sense that God wanted to do some "major surgery" in my life before he felt that I was ready for the responsibility of eldership. I kept "praying it in". I invited the Holy Spirit to do whatever He needed to do to prepare and equip me for my coming role. But, to my surprise (and concern), life went on as usual, and no "major surgery" took place. I could not, however, escape the feeling of absolute certainty that God was definitely going to do something major in my life to prepare me, and that it was going to happen before January 11, 1990.

As the months crept by, I kept talking with Rosie about this, and kept watching for signs of what God was up to. But still nothing. I also talked with several of the other brothers who were considering eldership, notably Phil Kendrick, David Hooper, and Andy Reese, to see what they felt they were hearing from God. All three were leaning towards accepting the responsibility.

As I mentioned earlier, God didn't seem to be saying that I should become an elder, just that I could. That bothered me a little. So I sought God for confirmation. I asked Him to give me a word from scripture that would help me see that He wanted me to do this. He immediately directed me to Hebrews 5:1-4, a passage dealing with the subject of the "high priest" in Israel – and ultimately, how Jesus is our high priest.

He was able to bring this passage to mind rather handily, as I had been working on memorizing the book of Hebrews. The passage reads:

“Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.” (Hebrews 5:1-4)

Obviously, an elder and a high priest are two entirely different things. But there are some similarities, as godly leaders of the people relating to spiritual things, and there were definitely some things God wanted me to see here. The gentle, empathetic leadership necessary to deal with God’s people; the fact that the high priest is not a “cut above” other men, but a sinner like they are, in need of forgiveness. Good stuff.

But one phrase leapt out at me as never before: **“No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.”** So I needed to be sure I was called by God. *Just as Aaron was.* How was Aaron called by God to be the first high priest? I didn’t know. So I looked it up. And I discovered an amazing thing, reading Exodus 4:14-17, 27-28. God himself did not call Aaron directly. He sent Aaron’s brother Moses to do it. He simply told Aaron to go meet with Moses, and Moses relayed the call of God. In other words, Aaron was called by God when he was called by his brother. Wow. That was the kind of confirmation I needed. When my brothers called me to eldership, God was calling me through them.

Time went by slowly, and finally, January 10 arrived – the day before my birthday. It was a Wednesday. I went to work at Baptist Hospital as usual. My job at Baptist involved walking around the hospital delivering medications to the nursing stations. I worked for the hospital pharmacy, and delivered to each nurses’ station once each hour. I did lots of walking and saw lots of people. I enjoyed my work. It was a great opportunity to bring “a little sunshine” to the nurses, who had to immerse themselves in other people’s suffering for many hours each day. So I tried to be funny, upbeat and, at the same time, sensitive. I also saw, through the course of my day, many other people from other departments, and got to know most of the employees of the hospital as I passed and greeted them.

All through that day, I kept my eyes and ears open – fully expecting that at any moment I would be tested as never before, and that God would take me through the fire. Rosie called at noon: “Anything happening yet?” Nope. Nothing. “God’s going to have to do something awfully big in a very short time!”

My mind was filled with questions, but every time I was tempted to second guess what I thought I had heard, I received a strong reassurance in my spirit. “Just wait. You’re not 40 yet.”

After work, I drove home, ate supper with the family, and we went off to Wednesday night church service together. During the opening time of worship, I knelt down and closed my eyes, just focusing on God. Suddenly in my mind’s eye, I saw a picture of a man in an attitude of humility, with his head shaved. My mind struggled with the picture; my heart started racing, and I groped to find some hidden

meaning besides the obvious. But as I did, the conviction grew within me that God wanted me to shave my head, and shave off my moustache. Yikes!

I must confess, this is not at all the kind of “major surgery” I had anticipated. And my mind was offended. “Surely this can’t be what you want me to do! NO! Absolutely not!” And yet, quietly within me, a very peaceful assurance was building, along with the pressure of conviction, that this was exactly what God had in mind. And if I was going to be a leader in God’s church, I needed to “just trust and obey”, offended or not! I don’t remember another thing about that Wednesday night service. A great mountain had appeared before me, and I had to prepare to take it on.

The more I thought about it, the more it made sense. In the scripture, when a man made a serious vow to the Lord, like a Nazarite vow, he shaved his head, as a sign of humility and resignation to the will of God. I was about to embark upon a new season of service to God and His church. Serious consecration was certainly appropriate.

The ride home from church was a little tense. I told Rosie. She was incredulous.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.” (Long silence.)

“All your hair?”

“Yep.”

“Well, we knew something was coming. If this is it, you’d better do it.”

“Will you help me?”

“I guess. We’re in this together.”

We arrived home, put the boys to bed, and Rosie cut off my hair. When we got down to “fuzz level,” we used an electric razor, and then a regular razor to finish the job. We looked at each other with smiles and question marks in our eyes, slowly shaking our heads, both thinking “his ways are not our ways,” and went to bed, both wondering what my birthday, January 11, 1990, held in store. In 1990, very few people went around with their heads shaved. And those that did usually were “skinheads,” members of white supremacist groups. I was going to stick out like a sore thumb.

The next morning I woke after a restless night, apprehensive but excited for what the day held in store. I drove to work an hour early, managed to sneak into the pharmacy unseen by anyone at the hospital, and slipped unnoticed into the conference room – a room secluded from the sight of other pharmacy areas.

I got out my Bible and I prayed. I asked the Lord for something from His Word to start my day. I immediately felt directed to Deuteronomy 8. This was familiar territory. We had been living in Deuteronomy 8 for several years. Israel is on the threshold of actually laying hold of all that God has promised them. And God, like a good coach, is giving them a final “locker room talk” before taking them across into the land.

I started to read the passage and I started to weep. I’m crying now as I’m writing this. Two verses, 2 and 3, stood out to me like neon signs on a clear, dark night.

“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” (Deut. 8:2-3)

What a rich passage. The purpose of the wilderness is revealed. Our difficulties do have a purpose. God is testing us, to know what is in our hearts, whether or not we will obey His commands. Whether He can trust us. It is He that causes us to hunger, and then satisfies that hunger, so that we will learn that the food that really satisfies is His Word.

But the phrase that really touched my heart, that really drew me in, was “these forty years.” My 40th birthday. 40 years old. I really knew that morning, in a way I had never sensed before, that God had been leading me, Randy Moody, in a very personal and attentive way, for all the 40 years of my life. The eyes of Him who spoke this massive universe into being had been watching over me all this time. His eye is on me. He cares for me. I am important to Him. I cannot express the impact of that. I was undone.

Suddenly, a voice that seemed to come from within me commanded, “Prostrate yourself before me.” I lay face down on the floor of the conference room. The voice came again, “This is where I want you every morning for the rest of your life – on your face before me. And I will meet you here.” I felt so close to God at that moment. I just wanted to stay there in His presence. But he said, “Now, get up.”

He let me know that he wanted me to fast. (“Fast on my birthday...” I thought, “That’s different.”) “Now go to work.” My stomach was suddenly in a knot, and I was scared to death. “But Lord,” I said, “People are going to assume the worst. They’re going to ask me what I’m doing this for. What should I say?” God was not unprepared for this. “Whenever someone asks you why you shaved your head, you will tell them: **‘I shaved my head for my 40th birthday to humble myself before the Lord, and as a way of dedicating to Him the next 40 years or however many He gives me.’** That’s all you need to say.”

Wow. I sat there amazed at the Lord, and was flooded with His peace. I practiced saying it a few times, until it came very naturally. I was ready. I got up, walked out of the conference room, and walked into the main part of the pharmacy to punch in at the time clock.

A dozen of my co-workers were waiting by the clock to punch in as well. As soon as they saw me, it was as if someone had lit a fuse. Their faces scowled in anger, and a swell of voices started yelling at me, demanding to know what I thought I was doing! It was at least a minute before I could quiet them down. I held up my hands like a policeman stopping traffic. When it was quiet, and their anger simply smoldering, I quietly spoke. “I shaved my head for my 40th birthday to humble myself before the Lord, and as a way of dedicating to Him the next 40 years or however many He gives me.” In an instant of time, the anger just dissipated. They were quiet for a moment, and then one by one they commented on what they had heard. “That’s really cool, Randy.” “Wow. Happy Birthday, man. That’s different, but hey, that’s okay.” And they all turned and went to work, just like any other day. Just by the release of those words, given to me by God, everything returned to normal. Peace and sanity reigned. “To humble you

and to test you..." "To teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." Who but God could have devised this?

I walked throughout the hospital that morning as usual, and everywhere I went the reaction was the same. Anger, judgment and misunderstanding gave way to interest, encouragement and good wishes as I spoke the words that God had given me. I got to speak of the Lord, on the job, to dozens of people. Amazing.

There were a few who, sometimes comically, just didn't "get it." Like the unit clerk in Psych. "Oh, Randy, honey, don't you know there are just hundreds of men who would give anything to have a head of hair like yours?" "I wish I had known," I thought mischievously, "I could have saved it for them in a Ziploc bag."

At lunch time, I went back to the conference room, and had a sweet time with the Lord. When the time was up, I felt God saying that my fasting for the day was done. Hmmm. Interesting.

Mid-afternoon, I returned from one of my rounds, and was told that my boss wanted to see me in the conference room. When I opened the door, the whole staff was assembled, and a huge birthday cake was set at the head of the table. ("That's why the fasting suddenly ended," I thought. "Thank you, Lord.") The pharmacy director made a little speech, wishing me a happy birthday, and commending me for my faith and obedience. Then we enjoyed a time of cake-eating and fellowship. Several had cards and presents. Wow.

My work day concluded with several more rounds. God had indeed humbled me, tested me, sent me forth to speak of Him to all the various groups of people in the hospital, and increased my faith in Him and His call with every step. What an amazing experience. "Major surgery" that blessed and ministered to a couple hundred people all in one day. And got them thinking about him. What an infinitely creative God we serve.

That evening, we went to Richard and Terrie Curtis' home for what I thought was just our regular "small group" meeting. Instead, friends from all over Nashville had been invited to come and bring a prayer or a blessing in honor of my birthday. I also got to give testimony to them of my amazing day with God, (after all, they were curious about the "new look" as well). I felt so incredibly blessed. And humbled again. They prayed for me, blessed me, and spoke loving, encouraging words over me that touched me very deeply.

By the time I got home that evening, I felt that every ounce of physical energy had been sapped from my being. But inside I was still "wired" and completely awed by all that had transpired in the last 24 hours. But my amazing day was still not over. Unbeknownst to me, my amazing wife Rosie had written to all kinds of friends from all over the country who had known me for the last 40 years. And they had sent cards secretly (to another address) to bless me on my birthday. I heard from people that I hadn't heard from in decades. It was just amazing. All I could do at that point was weep tears of joy at the goodness of God.

My hair grew back, but the effects of that day were lasting.

I served the Lord for seven years as a Belmont elder, and then I felt Him calling me to just concentrate on my own family for a while. I still get on my face before Him in the morning, as He instructed, and He is always there. I teach two-year-olds at church, and it is no problem for me to get down on the floor with them and be silly. Bark like a dog. Moo like a cow. “Honk” their noses (I pretend to “beep” their noses like a car horn, as I make a honking sound). They know that Mr. Randy is a friend who loves them. I try to speak to them of Jesus at their level, so they know that He loves them too.

And I still try to consecrate every day of my life to Him. “However many he gives me.”

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