

# **Sanders Family Adventures**

## **Part 1 From Hope to Faith**



## The Adventure Begins

June 2013

In 2010 Jenny and I had dinner with some dear friends that we had not seen for many years. I know, with the aid of hindsight, that it was that dinner that planted the seed to go on the greatest adventure of our married life. I say “with the aid of hindsight” because at that time there was no way that I would allow myself to entertain the thought of stepping away from my very comfortable, safe life to have an adventure. The dinner simply planted a seed. The seed was in the form of a question. The question was; ” who tells me what to do?”.

As a good Christian, I am familiar with the passage of the Bible (Matthew [6:24](#)) that says we can not serve God and Money. We must choose only one. No matter how badly I wanted my answer to the question; “who tells me what to do?” to be ” God does” it was not. Money was the answer. Money told me where to live, the type of education my children could have and the car I drive. I found myself in a crisis of conscience and I quietly contemplated that question for the next year and a half.

Spring forward now to 2012. Jenny and I were celebrating our 14th wedding anniversary with a trip to Nashville, Tennessee. My parents had graciously offered to keep the children for us, so we dropped them off at my parents house on the way to Nashville. The drive to Nashville gave Jenny and I something that few parents of young children get, hours and hours of uninterrupted talking time. We spent the next several days pouring our hearts out to one another. I vocalized the question that had given me a crisis of conscience and Jenny was able to do the same. A good friend shared the book ” A Million Miles In A Thousand Years ” by Donald Miller with us and we listened to it on the return trip. The book was like listening to our conversations that we had been having. By the time we returned to pick up the children, we felt like what we needed to do was put our house up for sale and that we would know what to do next. I would like to interject here that, in hindsight, we both new that this would result in a move for our family, but we would not allow our minds to go there because admitting that was far too scary.

[Tuesday night](#) is family night at the Sanders house. No one is allowed to schedule events on Tuesday. We keep that evening open to simply be together. [Tuesday night](#) can also be a time for the family to discuss issues. If someone has a topic for the family to discuss (getting a dog, allowance) they can request a family meeting. These meetings take a more formal tone, with the presenter sharing their thoughts and calling for a vote of support.

Shortly after returning from our trip I called a family meeting. [Tuesday night](#) came and I called the meeting to order. I began by telling the kids our story. I told of how Jenny and I met and how nervous I was when I asked her to be my wife. I told them about building our first house. I shared how nervous I was each time I found out that I would be a father and how nervous I was when we sold our first house and bought our second one. The telling of the story took over an hour, the kids loved hearing their own history. I got to the part of the story that was current and told the kids that Jenny and I feel that it was time for us to sell our house again and this time we are not sure what that means for our family, we may buy another house in Hudson or we may move away from Hudson. I informed the kids that this is no longer the adventure of Aaron and Jenny, but the adventures of Aaron, Jenny, Alexander, Jackson, Maxwell and Isabella. Since it was their adventure as well, we put the selling of the house and the unknowns that it brings to a vote. The adventure was unanimously ratified. That family meeting was one of the greatest times for our family. We all left that meeting excited to be adding to our family story.

The summer of 2012 was long and arduous! In order to sell our house, we needed to finish a lower level bathroom, remodel two bedrooms, replace all stair treads and paint the entire upstairs. My parents

took the kids for a month and Jenny and I worked like never before. By fall, we were ready to list the house. We listed the house in September and had a steady stream of showings. December arrived without an offer on the house, so we took it off of the market. This was a relief to me. I was starting to have serious anxiety about the house selling. In my heart I knew the sale of the house meant a move and separation from an amazing job (I know, I know that is not supposed to matter to a Christian...).

In April we put the house on the market again. This time we had an offer for full price within 24 hours. It is at this point that I felt very sick. Up to this point I had told myself that God would not want me to leave such a good job, my church and our beautiful home. I clung to the hope that this

entire thing was some sort of faith test and I would be spared the selling of my home. Days and weeks passed and Jenny and I agreed that if indeed the house sold, we would move to Nashville, Tennessee. I was secretly hoping that the final inspection (the buyer's bank appraisal) would not go through and I would be spared, but that was not the case.

We now had a closing date and I had to do one of the hardest things I have ever done. I sat down with my manager and informed him of our decision to move. This was hard for me in many ways. First, my job with its excellent salary and benefits was a gift from God. I was not "qualified" to do the job; however, I excelled at it. Second, I truly enjoyed what I did. Finally, I have a great deal of respect for my manager. He is a fellow Christian and we had grown to have a great relationship. He is not only my mentor in business, but a dear friend. I shared the news with him and he was very supportive. He and I had discussed the possibility that this day may come over a year before and he was aware of my concerns with stepping away from my job and moving. His faith in God's providence for the situation has been a source of much encouragement.

## **Into The Unknown**

June 2013

All of this may sound crazy to you. I have sold my house, quit an excellent job and moved to a city where I do not have a job. All because Jenny and Aaron “felt” it was the right thing to do. It certainly sounded crazy to me! Those of you that know me, know that I am very methodical and am not subject to whimsical decisions. This entire adventure has made me question my sanity. I told God that I feel like I am losing my mind and that I feel like everyone around me thinks that I am crazy. Additionally, I told God that if I knew that Jeremiah 29:11 applied to this adventure I would do my best to embrace it and trust him for a job, home and support. I did not share that prayer with anyone, I wanted God to show me, without people being able to orchestrate it. Three weeks later, I received the following email from a former co-worker:

Aaron,

I wanted to follow up on our conversation from last week and let you know that I’ve been thinking a lot about your decision and praying for you and your family as you get ready to take the steps of faith that God has been leading you to. I wanted to send you a word of encouragement and let you know how much I appreciate the great example of faith that you are demonstrating. I can’t wait to hear the story of how God uses you!

This morning, in another of the “Follow” sermon series, Andy Stanley was talking about when making a decision to follow Him will be difficult, counter cultural and maybe even appear “crazy”, but that doing so will be a defining moment in your life. He also referenced the following verse, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jer 29:11 (NIV). I am confident that the Lord has plans for you and your family. Thank you for making the decision to follow Him!

This email spoke word for word to my prayer about feeling crazy and needing to know that Jeremiah 29:11 applied. There have been many of these very encouraging events. I am thankful for the support and love that has been shown to me and our family. I am confident that we are doing the right thing (even though I still think it is crazy) and am looking forward to what the next chapter will bring. I certainly hope that it brings a job... Stay tuned!

## **In The Interim**

July 2013

We have been in Tennessee for about three weeks and have met many wonderful people (everyone is friendly and talkative). We went to a worship gathering with Anthony Skinner and the Immersion Family Band (check them out on youtube). They meet in a local Deli, and the atmosphere of worship was amazing. We have also taken a membership with a local Recreation Center. The kids are in heaven with racquetball, basketball, game rooms, and two pools (indoor and outdoor). Alex has become my new workout partner and has already received compliments on his “good form” from a fellow hardcore gym rat.

We have spent the last week visiting with my parents. The kids stay with them every summer, so they are having a blast (no pun intended) shooting guns and driving the ATV trails. I posted video on FaceBook of a wild ride Jack took Jenny and I on.

I am so thankful for the family time that we have been having. Maybe it is not such a bad thing to not have a job yet...

## **Time Marches On**

August 2013

We have lived in Tennessee for six weeks now. Alex, Jack, Max and Bella have spent the last few weeks with my parents in Illinois. They are having a great time and I am glad that they have this time with my parents, grandparents and extended family but I miss them a lot. I will be glad to give them big hugs when they return this week.

Jenny and I have had a very stressful schedule of morning cardio/weight training and afternoon pool lounging... I know, I know it is rough but someone needs to do it.

We have also met some wonderful new friends. One couple invited us to go to a Salvation Army church in Nashville. I was not sure what to expect as the area (east Nashville) was described as a “bad neighborhood”. We arrived right on time and were greeted by some of the most colorful and friendly people. As a side note, I certainly have a greater sympathy for people who visit a church for the first time, it is scary. The “service” was like nothing I had ever attended. The format was based on I Corinthians 14:26 which says:

“Well, my brothers and sisters, let’s summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.”

The seats were in a semi circle in the chapel so that some people were behind you, some beside you and some across from you. One person had a guitar and a base drum and lead in some pretty amazing singing (this is Nashville after all, everyone is amazingly talented). Once the singing was through the “pastor” explained the format (I Corinthians 14:26) and lead us in prayer about how the rest of the service should go and then sat down. It was the most amazing thing I have ever experienced! Everything flowed together wonderfully. Several people spoke including me. Additionally, a couple who were missionaries to China for many years spoke directly to Jenny and I about our move and the purpose of the move. It was like they had been listening to our conversations and had the answers to our questions. It was one of the most authentic experiences of my Christian life.

It was also very encouraging to see what the group is doing for their community in East Nashville. I noticed many small children outside after we had met and was sad to hear that these 5 and 6 year old children wander the streets unsupervised. They come to the Salvation Army for free food and kind

people. I was thankful that these people were not only interested in getting what they needed (spiritual growth, etc) but took I Corinthians 14:26 seriously when it said “everything that is done must strengthen ALL of you.” The Berry Street Salvation Army may not be our permanent church home but it holds a special place in our hearts and it is a place that I want my kids to spend some time.

For those curious about the job thing... Not much has happened there. I had given God a deadline (I will pause here for your laughter) of July 1. That came and went with no significant activity. I did have an interview for a supervisor position with a local company but it quickly became apparent to myself and the interviewer that this job was not for me. However, they did have another position that may be more challenging and I have interviewed for it as well.

I say ” not much has happened” regarding the job front, but that is not quite true. One thing that has happened is that I feel as though I have let the fear and concern about provision for my family go and I now have a peace about it that is not contrived. Those of you who know me well know that that is nothing short of a miracle.

## Did You Get A Job Yet?

August 2013

My generation has been told that in order to enjoy life, we need to be able to do something that will result in the ability to “sell” our services to the highest bidder. That it does not matter if you are passionate about what you do as long as you get top dollar for the time that you do it. As a result, we rush out to make ourselves marketable to the highest bidder. This results in people successfully finding employment with their time being handsomely compensated. The question that keeps going through my mind is, what if there is more and we are missing the “more” by readily “selling” the most precious commodity we have; time.

*“We are lovers who are far to easily infatuated with a cardboard cut out of the real deal”*- Mike Emlet

The truth of this statement has had a profound impact on me lately. When I lived in Wisconsin I had a life that anyone would consider blessed. I was involved in a great church, had a beautiful home and a great job that I sold 45 hours of my life to, on a weekly basis. By all standards of my generation, I was successful.

Three months later, I am looking back and realizing that I was in love with a cardboard cutout of the real deal. Spending three months together as a family has allowed me to see how cheaply I had sold my 45 hours per week to my job. My children are more confident and at peace than I ever thought possible. They truly feel that they are the blessing I always said they were. Now that my actions are lining up with my words, they see that they have worth and they are coming alive under the power of that concept.

We are privileged to know others who have seen that there is more to life. They have stepped out to embrace their heart’s passion, in spite of what their generation has told them. I am inspired by their boldness. Instead of fitting into the cookie cutter life that has been offered, they willingly stand against the tide and are building a life that others want to fit into. A life of passion and fulfillment.

Money is just a tool and it should be used by people; instead, it appears that money is a tool that uses people. What tells us where to live, what car to drive, where the kids go to school, where to travel and what clothes you can wear? The answer for most of us is money. I am not saying money is bad, I am saying it is a necessary tool for life, but it is not the goal of life. It is simply a tool to aid us in living the lives for which we were designed.

As a follower of Christ, I want my life to be directed by Him and I want to use my God given passion and purpose at His beck and call (I can’t serve God and money at the same time...). As a result, I am no longer actively searching for traditional employment. I am trusting that there is something better than the cardboard cutout that I have been so in love with all of my life. After seeing glimpses of the “real deal” in my family, I can’t go back now. God is either all powerful and real or He is not. I am willing to wager everything that HE IS REAL AND POWERFUL!

I am focusing all of my energies on loving God, loving my family and loving my neighbor as myself.

## Unanswered Prayer

September 2013

Looking back at my thoughts, desires and hopes for the last months I see one thing clearly: I don't know what is best.

When we left Wisconsin, back in May, I had a clear expectation of what would be best for me and my family. I expected that we would have 3-4 weeks to get settled in and that I would have another great job by July 1st (some of you may remember the blog where I gave God until July 1). July came and went and August was here before I knew it. I had applied for many, many jobs.

There is one thing you need to know about this particular area of Tennessee: they did not get the memo about hard times and a recession. This area is experiencing unprecedented growth. As a result, jobs are not hard to come by; however, I only got one call back. It was for a management position close to my home and I was informed that I was overqualified and would hate the job if they hired me!! Who says that?! My sincere prayer, and that of many dear friends, was for God to give me a good paying 40 hour a week job and I was perplexed at why God was refusing to listen.

Several friends, who have lived in the area for many years, assured me that getting no response at all was not normal for this job market. I felt as though God was deliberately ignoring me. I felt myself beginning to question God. I had questions that sounded very familiar (from the Old Testament), "God, have you brought me and my family to Tennessee, so that we can be destroyed?" It was at this point that I felt I needed to make a choice. I needed to choose to continue to trust God or to use my own power to make something happen. I am not going to lie to you, I struggled with this decision.

Jenny and I were talking about all of this on a Tuesday night in early August and it was that night that I resolved that no matter what happens, even if my family is destroyed and it appears that God has abandoned me, I will not deny him. I prayed that night and told God that my hopes, intentions and dreams of a job were obviously not what he intended and that I would no longer pursue them. Instead, I would focus on my family, after all, that is one of the main reasons we felt we were directed to move here. I also resolved to focus my energies on loving God (instead of questioning) and loving others. Finally, I asked him to show me some sign, the following day, that he was still with me. I can honestly say that I went to bed that night with a very real peace in my heart.

The next morning as the kids were getting ready for school I received a text from a very dear friend. He was encouraging me to keep doing what is in my heart and not to worry about provision. A short time later I received an email from another great friend encouraging me, with my own words from previous blog posts (when my faith was high), and pleading with me to continue to trust God. These were great, but honestly I was looking for God to have one of the many companies call me for an interview or something (I know, I said I gave that up, but I am still human!!). That evening I sat down with a man that had something to discuss with me that he felt was from God and would specifically bless my family. After discussing what he felt God had shown him, I took it home to Jenny. We discussed it and prayed about it and felt like it was the answer to our need. In hindsight, it was exactly what we needed and I can not express to you how glad I am that my prayers, for another good job, were not answered. I now have my financial burden taken from me and am blessed with all the time that I need to be with my family, love God and love my neighbor as myself.

God was not being harsh in ignoring my requests, he was simply saying "no, I have something better". I am ashamed that I was on the verge of being angry at him for that. I know, as a parent, how sad I am when my children get angry with me for sincerely trying to make their life better and I am sorry that I was acting the same way towards my father.

I am sharing all of this with you for two reasons. 1.) I want a very real record of my struggles/fears and God's guidance in my life. 2.) I want each of you to pursue God and his purpose for your lives. I am intentionally not sharing the details of God's provision for my family, because it is his provision for my family. It is up to you to step out and trust him for your own life.

I want to encourage those of you whom God has "let down". Maybe it was a sickness that he did not heal, a job he did not supply, a loved one he did not protect. I want you to know that he is good and that he has your best interests in mind. Trust him, no matter what things around you appear to be, and you will find what people have found for generations. HE IS REAL!!

Now that God "hired" me, I am praying for direction on how to use my time. Jenny and I feel like we will both be volunteering at the children's schools and are actively looking for opportunities to love others.

### **No More PR** November 2013

Last year it dawned on me that I was tired of being a public relations person for God. I realized that for some reason I felt an obligation to put a spin on things that always made God look good. It was not a conscious thing but more of a involuntary response that I had developed over time.

As Christians we tend to use phrases like "It was a God thing" or "God worked it all out". These phrases are used exclusively for situations that work out well and make good sense. You never hear them applied to a flat tire, a lost job or a car accident. According to the Bible God is actually responsible for many things that none of us would call "good". Remember Job??

The disciples of Jesus were called away from their comfortable family businesses to go do something that does not qualify as good by our current standards. As a result, God was able to be his own PR person. He performed miracles that spoke for themselves.

Our current Christian world suffers from an absence of the supernatural miracle. As a result, the Christians rely on church buildings, the number of people attending and the scale of their programs to convince people that God is with them. There are also some who would agree with my previous statement and feel that their particular group does not rely on those things and believe they do have the supernatural active in their group. I would have been in that group, until last year.

I began to look critically (not negatively, just critically) at what I counted as supernatural, compared to what the disciples of Jesus experienced. One thing that was notably missing was a supernatural love for other people. My love was reserved for people who thought and acted like me. Everyone else was my "mission". I needed to get them to see "the truth". I did not actually love people. I know this because I would get frustrated when they did not see "the truth".

I also looked at what I called a miracle. If I were to go to church and someone had a headache or some legitimate sickness and that person was healed I would talk of that miracle for years to come and it would serve to remind me and show others that God is with us. Then I read in Mark chapter 6 where Jesus could not do any miracles, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. It was then that I realized I have been selling myself short. Jesus is almost apologetic that all He could do was to heal a few sick folk and I was perfectly satisfied with that being the full extent of the miraculous.

That is when I decided to stop being the PR guy for God. I decided that I would no longer be satisfied with the healing of a few sick folk. I was interested in God being His own PR person and seeing greater things than the disciples saw. That decision required me to do some pretty crazy things and, as you can read in my earlier blogs, they did not always make sense.

As I take inventory this fall, I can honestly say that I never want to go back to being God's PR guy. He is doing a great job of that for Himself. We are in contact with 4 families, from diverse Christian backgrounds, that picked up and moved here and all of their stories are eerily similar to our own. God has provided a way for us to survive and thrive without needing to work a traditional 40 hour a week job and our family has never felt closer to God. It feels like we have literally partnered with God as a family.

I am not sure what is next, but I am confident it will be more than the healing of a few sick folk.

### **I Learn Something New Everyday**

November 2013

I am thrilled by many aspects of our family adventure, but none more than what I have seen in my children. They are so hungry to learn and have matured physically, spiritually, emotionally and mentally. I am also impressed with their bravery. They transitioned from a private school of 20+ students to a school with over 900 students and are not only surviving, they are thriving and loving every minute of it.

Jenny and I love being together as a family. Before we moved here, raising kids was one of the many things we did. It always felt like I was waiting for those family bonding moments. This weekend we will do... Soon we will go on a vacation and do... Inevitably it was not what we had hoped for or something came up. Typically, it was some noble task but in the end it resulted in missing that family bonding time.

A new born baby can swim on their own. They know how to hold their breath and propel themselves through the water. They are born with those skills. Adults "teach" the child that water is dangerous and if they fall in they will drown, as a result the child un-learns the skill and later has to be taught how to swim again. I believe that children are born perfectly equipped (personality, natural skill, etc.) to be who they are supposed to be (to feel fulfilled) and we, unwittingly, "teach" them to be something else. Let me be clear, we are not evil or spiteful in doing this. It happens because it takes time to identify each child's skill and time is a commodity that is in short supply.

When we decided to move Jenny and I both felt that the children would benefit the most. We could see that the school they would be attending is in one of the top ten school districts in the nation and the cultural change would help them be more well rounded individuals. What we could not see, is that the children desperately needed dad and mom around to help them develop the skills that they were born with. I always considered myself a very involved dad, but over the last six months I realized that I did not know my kids. I was good at getting them to and from their events and making sure they ate right, did their homework, stayed on task and had manners, but I did not know them. I was unwittingly leaving their natural talents and purpose uncultivated.

I wish I could say I realized this and made a point of trying to remedy it, but the truth is I only realized it as I began to spend massive amounts of time with them. Then I began to see their passions come out. Passions that were deep within them and had been overlooked by me for so long. One of the things we have developed a habit of doing, thanks to Isabella, is going around the room telling each other about the character traits we see and appreciate in each other. As we were doing this over the weekend, I realized just how much I have learned about my kids in the last few months and I am excited to make an effort to learn more and reinforce their passions and purpose.

## Who Do You Think You Are?

November 2013

When we initially shared the news that our family would be moving to the Nashville area, many were not excited about our departure. Some were sad because of the distance that would separate us and others were concerned about our motives. One in particular, simply did not like it because they had not authorized it! They had grown accustomed to my family asking them about every detail of our life and mindlessly obeying everything they had to say. We would ask them for permission to do everything from taking someone out to dinner to where our children should go to school. Honestly, sometimes I think they got sick pleasure from telling us “no”. The thought that we would make a move without even a consultation with them was unthinkable in their mind.

When we finally sold our house and packed our belongings in the moving truck, I could almost see them in the rear view mirror, with their arms crossed, shaking their head and clucking their tongue as if to say; “you’ll realize the error that you have made and will return to beg for help”. When we arrived in Tennessee, they called almost daily with a reminder that we had not asked permission for this adventure and to inform us that we should enjoy ourselves while we can because our time is almost up.

I eventually got tired of it and started talking back. I informed them that our family’s desire was to be directed by God and that nothing else can tell us what we can and cannot do. I gave examples of how much better our family functioned and how much we all had grown spiritually. Additionally, I pointed out that Jenny and I had never been more confident in our calling or more at peace with our situation than we are today. Finally, I informed them that I believe their advice to be worthless. I told them that Jenny and I will do everything we can to convince others that their advice is wrong. I threatened to tell the world about the despicable lies that are being spit at them!!! (yes, I was a little angry at this point).

Well, you can imagine how they responded to this! Honestly, I think they were a little unsure what to do at first. I don’t think they are accustomed to being spoken to like that. Once they got their wits about them again, they went into a rage. Really! A full on childish tantrum! It was almost laughable! They threatened to completely destroy me and my family. Additionally, they told me that I should never breath a negative word to anyone about who they are and what I think about their advice, or I would regret it...

If you know me, you can just imagine how I responded to those threats.

Here is my response: Money is a liar!!! It prides itself on directing every aspect of your life, but it is secretly keeping you from the greatness and peace that you were designed for. Money tells your church group where it can meet, who it can help and how big of an impact it can have. It tells you what dreams you can pursue and what dreams will have to wait for later (which never comes). Stop listening to him immediately! Tap into your heart and ask God what he wants you to do/be and once you know, go do it with everything you have. God will provide for you. Money will tell you that you can’t or shouldn’t, but HE IS A LIAR!!

Examine your life and you may find that a significant part of your time is taken doing things that drain you. Because of this, you may find yourself lacking time and energy to do what makes your heart sing. I know, I know, all of this is perfectly normal for our society, but I do not believe that is how this life was designed to be lived. We have purchased a second rate substitute. I don’t want any of my friends laying on their death bed, regretting any part of their life.

One parting word for you money... No one, and I mean NO ONE gets away with threatening my family and our God given purpose.

## Thanksgiving

November 2013

I want to take some time to document the things for which I am thankful. This blog's intended audience is my family in 10+ years and I want them to know what I am thankful for.

### Adventure:

Adventure awakens the human heart in every way. Whether occurring by design or accident, adventure spurns legends and timeless tales. It beckons the comfortable, monotonous participants of life to expect more from their short time on earth. Adventures are not safe and they offer few guarantees, but they teach us about faith and trust. I am thankful for adventure.

### Support:

Our family has been blessed with a fantastic support system. Friends and family are a constant source of strength. Since Jenny and I began our life adventure together we have always had people that believe in us. This support system is not something that we will ever take for granted. We are thankful for every conversation, phone call, email, text message and FB post. I am thankful for support.

### Children:

Alex, Jack, Max and Bella, this blog may not mean much to you today. My hope is that when you read it, in the years to come, that you know how valuable you are to me. There are many family movies that are made and most present a situation where the parents need to choose between their career and their children. The happy endings always find the parent choosing the children over the career. I want you to know that your mother and I chose you over everything. Your boundless energy, strength and love have taught us what is truly important in life. I am thankful for my children.

### Wife:

I am not even sure where to start. You seem to possess every talent in the known world; however, I am most grateful for your faithfulness. I remember some well meaning advice that we received prior to being married. We were told that the first year of marriage would be very difficult. It would consist of two people learning to get along and learning how to live with each other's annoying habits. More importantly, I recall the conversation that you and I had immediately following.

We discarded that advice and agreed that our first year of marriage would be the best year of our lives and that each year following would get better. Thank you for honoring that agreement, these 16 years. There will always be books written about the kind of love we share, simply because no one author can accurately describe it. They have been struggling to convey it for centuries; however, it can not be explained. It must be felt. I am thankful for my wife.

## Value

December 2013

Over the last month our family has been challenged by the concept of value. We have been discussing what value means to us and what we are willing to sacrifice in order to have it. As professed Christians, we find value in having a relationship with God. The problem is that, to have a Biblically accurate relationship with God, we must be willing to act on our faith, not simply have it. Remember the book of James?

Max put it best last night, as we were preparing for bed. He said, "Honestly, before our adventure, I only prayed at church and even then not every time. Now I pray at home and school and well, everywhere!". I then asked everyone else if they had experienced the same thing. They all agreed that they only rarely prayed before our adventure and now it is a very real part of their everyday life. Max went on to share, "Before the adventure we were the people, that we would talk about, that went to church and did all of the good things but did not really know God."

I must admit that Max's statements are spot on for me as well. This adventure has caused me to take my faith from its comfortable perch and put it into dangerous action. Once I did that; prayer, fasting and Bible reading moved from something that I should do (had to make time for), to something that I had to do in order to survive. My faith is no longer an academic exercise. I have taken it out of the laboratory and put it into everyday application.

Here is the strange thing: the above concepts are not new to me. I have always wanted my children to have a real, dynamic relationship with God. I wanted to truly walk by faith and trust God for everything. Additionally, I had plans to accomplish these things. I wanted to do family devotions, love others unselfishly and develop a greater level of trust in God. One year ago, if you had asked me how I was doing on those endeavors, I would have told you I was doing quite well. We had family devotions (most of the time...) and we went to church and encouraged others. In hindsight; however, I realize that I had established an elaborate facade, so that I would believe that I had the relationship that I valued, when I did not.

I desperately wanted to have the relationship with God; however, I was never willing to put action to my faith. I had dreams of greatness for God, but I was content for them to happen "some day". Instead of embracing those dreams, I convinced myself that I had everything I needed. I could even convince myself that I did act on my faith and care about the widows, poor and fatherless. This facade allowed me to have the best of both worlds; the American dream and a relationship with God. The problem is that it was not real.

I am not sad about this, quite the opposite. I am excited to realize that I no longer value the facade. I now see real, active faith in the lives of my children. I do not feel like I need to rush them off to a revival or "good" church service in order for them to connect with God and feel encouraged. I know they will do that at home and school and well, everywhere.

If you are looking to buy a piece of real estate and, while inspecting the property, you identify a rich vein of gold on it. You would gladly sell everything you have in order to buy that land. You do this because the gold is of more value than anything you currently have and once you possess that gold, the things you sold will pale in comparison.

This is how I feel about the relationship with God, and others, that I see in myself and my family. It's value far outweighs anything I had to give up in order to get it. I feel like our entire family has been on

an intensive 6 month course that has helped us see ourselves and God in a more clear way. I trust that this intense course will continue for the rest of our lives.

### **The Shipwreck** December 2013

I clearly remember sitting at my desk, in my St. Paul, MN office, contemplating quitting my job and moving my family to Tennessee. I knew, in my heart, it was what I was supposed to do; however, I was afraid. I liked my job and the people I worked with. Additionally, I was concerned about what the move would do to my family, long term (college educations, orthodontists, etc.). After I worked up the courage to do what I knew was right, my first order of business was to find a job in Tennessee.

I spent some time updating and polishing my resume (it had been 12 years since I had need of one). I completed my resume and opened the web browser to begin researching employment sites and immediately I had a very strong feeling that I was not supposed to pursue employment. I was dumbfounded! Quitting my job and moving to Tennessee did not make sense in the first place and now I should not look for employment! I closed my eyes and began to pray and as clearly as I have ever “heard” from God, I felt like he said that I did not need to look for a job.

I would like to say that I closed the browser and walked away, but that is not what happened. Here is what I said to God: “I understand that you are directing me not to look for employment; however, I am still going to look because it makes me feel better.” I then did my research and posted my resume.

Weeks and months passed. We sold our home, I quit my job and we packed our life into a moving truck and set out for our adventure. I have mentioned how crazy I believed this to be in previous blog posts. I want to clarify that I have always known, in my heart, that all of this was right. My brain, on the other hand, always struggled with it.

Back to looking for employment. The employment sites turned out to be more of a pain in the neck than they were worth (surprise, surprise...). I received 8-10 interview requests daily. Most of these were insurance and financial sales positions, which I was not interested in. I applied for over 70 positions and only got one interview. That was the one where the person conducting the interview told me that I would be bored with the job if he hired me. I covered that story in a previous post. It was at this point that I gave up looking for employment (see post titled “Did You Get A Job Yet?”).

My heart was at peace with this decision; however, my mind was still struggling. After all, none of this made sense. You don’t quit your job, move across the country, rent a house, settle your family in and NOT get a job.

More time passed, and I met a man that introduced me to investing as a way to support my family. I was already familiar with the market, due to previous employment experience, so I was up and running in no time. It took a couple of months to learn the ropes and things were going quite well.

We had been planning a particular trade and the day before the trade I felt very strongly that I would lose everything in the trade the next day. I was not sure if that feeling was God warning me not to trade or if He was simply stating a fact. Jenny and I prayed together and told God that our lives were in His hands and that if we needed to lose everything, we would. God must have heard that prayer, because we lost everything in the following day's trade.

If you are a rational human being, you are now confident that Aaron and Jenny have lost their minds. They quit a great job, sold their beautiful home, left their friends and family, moved across the country and are now destitute. You would not be alone in those feelings. One thing; however, buoyed us at this point. It was that still, small voice in our hearts that said, "I called you on this adventure, and I know what you need". Strangely, Jenny and I felt peace about our situation. Furthermore, we felt like it was part of God's plan. The following passage from the book of Joel spoke to our hearts:

The Lord says, "I will give you back what you lost to the swarming locusts, the hopping locusts, the stripping locusts, and the cutting locusts. It was I who sent this great destroying army against you. Once again you will have all the food you want, and you will praise the Lord your God, who does these miracles for you. Never again will my people be disgraced. Then you will know that I am among my people Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and there is no other. Never again will my people be disgraced. (Joel 2:25-27 NLT)

The key part of the verse, to us, was "It was I who sent this great destroying army against you." Our prayer has always been to truly know God and we were willing to accept whatever needed to happen in order for that to become a reality. We believe that God has a purpose for each of His followers and we desperately wanted to know what that purpose was for us. If it meant losing everything to find it, so be it.

We also felt like we were not to tell others about our situation. We knew that our amazing friends and family would organize a "miracle" for us, if they knew, and we did not want that (see "No More PR" post). We were not opposed to people helping us, we just felt like God could handle the arrangements.

The weeks that followed were not easy. As a husband and father, I desperately wanted to get a job, any job, to save my family; however, Jenny and I felt that we simply needed to stand still and we would see the glory of God. This was the hardest thing I have ever done and I would not have been able to stand still without Jenny's support. The god of money/greed came at me with a vengeance, telling me that he

was the only savior and I must sell my life to him again in order to survive. See the post titled “Who Do You Think You Are?”, if you are interested in how that conversation went.

We felt like Peter walking on the water. If we allowed our minds to drift from the safety and peace of the still, small voice that told us everything was under control we began sinking fast. Every day we would receive encouragement from our Bible reading or timely words from a friend. Jenny faithfully recorded these in her journal.

We also explained the situation to the kids. They had initially agreed to this adventure (see blog titled, “The Adventure Begins”) and we wanted them to be fully aware of the learning experiences along the way. They handled it amazingly! Their faith was a constant source of strength for me. Much could be said about this span of time. We were deeply convicted about how we had idolized money, how we treated the needy and many other aspects of our life.

It was during this time that we felt the most growth in our relationship with God. We learned about not fretting for tomorrow, because today has enough trouble and about the need for these type of experiences in the human life (see “Skydiving” post). We learned that the Bible has all of the answers; however, sometimes we need to put our faith into action before we can see the answers (see “value” post). Additionally, we learned that this part of the adventure felt like an eternity!

The above was written 5 weeks after we lost everything. It is now the week of 12/16/2013. At the time I wrote the account above, we had never went hungry; however, we were behind on all of our bills and our water had been turned off once. We are now approaching 6 weeks from the loss and all of our bills have miraculously been paid (without government assistance or charities... We did not feel we could turn to that for salvation either), with exception of our rent. Today is Tuesday, 12/17/2013. If the rent is not paid on Friday, of this week, we will need to move out of our rented home. We believe that God has a plan and we will be fine with whatever he decides to do. Our job is to stand still and see the glory of God (see “Extreme Faith” post).

Today our prayer is that we will not be so consumed by our needs, that we miss the needs of those around us. After all, God calls believers to be salt and light, not to selfishly hide and pray for ourselves.

Wednesday 12/18/2013: I had an awesome thing happen late yesterday. I felt impressed to search the Internet for a specific quote (turned out to be from Francis Chan). Within 30 seconds of searching, I was on a guys blog (he had quoted Chan back in 2012) and his story is very similar to ours. He felt like God told him to quit his job and then watched as God stripped everything away for 6 months. Additionally, God would not let him get a job. He was encouraged by many of the same scriptures that we were and the still small voice of God was all he had to keep him going. He is now in China, with his family, ministering to orphans. We have been emailing back and forth since yesterday and are

committed to encouraging others who are following God with everything. This encounter is worth more to me than millions of dollars; it once again confirms that we are right where we are supposed to be.

Tonight I feel like God asked me what I thought would be best; to have him come through with the rent or to need to move in with our friends. I told him that it would be an interesting twist to the adventure to move in with our friends (very “first century church”, all things in common, etc), but I did not feel that our family could hold up for it (moving over Christmas, etc.). So, I said that I choose for him to pay the rent. I am not sure if that was my own mind or a real conversation with God, but it felt the same as the conversation that he had with me the day before the trade where we lost everything. I am still learning what his voice sounds like... I guess we will see. Never the less, not my will but yours...

Thursday 12/19/2013: Our bills are all current and we have groceries and some extra money (that is no small thing!!); however, we have no way to pay the rent. We have been meditating on Psalm 27 today. I am very thankful for the Bible. Not as a text book to pick to pieces or debate minor nuances, but as a lifeline. I am encouraged by the biblical accounts of others pursuing God, with everything, and feeling desperate for God to come through (I can relate!). I also see why the old church songs always talk about God never being early or late, but always on time. One day last week, we opened the phone bill and it was a late notice stating that our phones would be turned off if we did not pay. The very next letter we opened contained a check, that completely covered the phone bill, along with a note that said, “use this to pay your phone bill”. God is good!

Friday 12/20/2013 7:00am: We were greeted, this morning, by an email from a representative of the property management company. It was very compassionately worded and sensitively stated that we had agreed to make payment today or move out. He asked what our plans were. Jenny and I held hands and prayed. After praying, we both felt that we should respond and ask if we had the whole day to get back to him; because, if we are to pay, it will take a miracle. Additionally, we both felt that we needed to go get a few groceries (I know, strange, but none of this adventure makes sense). We replied to the email and went to the grocery store.

We still feel peace about all of this, but it is easy to see why the Israelites would long to return to Egypt when things got tough and the Egyptian army was swooping in to destroy them. God opened the Red Sea for them and we are confident he will provide a way of escape for us.

Friday 12/20/2013 7:00pm: we received an email from the property management company advising us that we would need to move out of our rented house by Sunday night. Amazingly, we are at peace with this also. We are still confident that all of this has come from God, for our good.

Monday 12/23/2013: The last two days was a frenzy of activity. The friend that I had gotten into investing with, invited my family to come and live with him and his family. They share the same desire to see a real, powerful God in our modern age. We are both interested in stepping out of the scripted liturgy and into the wild unknown with God. I am truly thankful for this man, his family and most importantly their heart for God.

We rented a moving truck and two storage units and moved out in two days. I am so very thankful for how my family and friends pulled together to make this all happen. We have spent our first night in our new lodgings and are thankful beyond measure.

When our family first set out on this adventure, we told God that we wanted to live a life that made a lasting impression. Specifically, we said we wanted our life's story to be as timeless as a classic book, such as *The Swiss Family Robinson*. We were fully aware that would mean having a shipwreck at some point; however, we also felt that our "shipwreck" would result in our family discovering our true purpose and being happier than ever.

I could never have imagined that our shipwreck would look quite like this, but I will embrace it because I know that all of God's classic tales have one (see "Skydiving" post). I have been reflecting on the life and influence of Corrie ten Boom and I am sure she could never have imagined that her "shipwreck" would look like time spent in the horrors of a Nazi prison camp; however, she has a classic tale that will encourage others for generations to come. I want my family to have a legacy of encouraging future generations to pursue God with their whole heart, no matter what the circumstances look like. We have counted the cost, picked up our cross and will follow, no matter what.

## Did I Hear That Correctly?

January 2014

Jenny and I have been reflecting on the numerous times in our life that we were confident we had “heard” God give us direction and then, when things got tough, questioned that direction. Here are some examples:

When we were first married (ages 19 and 20), we felt like we should build a house (really Jenny had the faith for this, I was just along for the ride). Jenny was employed in the realty business and had access to research our options. One afternoon she came into our small apartment with an excited glow on her face. She had connected with a realtor and we were going to build our first home. There was one minor drawback, we did not have the money.

We were both employed; however, we were just kids and had recently financed our wedding. It was at this point that we began to question if building a house really was what God had directed us to do. Then, completely unsolicited, a lady in the real estate business loaned us the money (interest free) that allowed us to build the house.

A couple of years passed. We had one child and another on the way, when I lost my job. Jenny had quit her job to be a stay at home mom, so I was the sole income earner. I was devastated. We questioned how God’s purposes could come out of such a catastrophic event. The unemployment lasted for three months, then I secured a new job. That new job would result in an annual salary that was three times what I was earning at the job I had lost. Additionally, I started the job and the family insurance, one month before my second son was born. Phew!

More time passed and Jenny and I both felt that we needed to sell our home and move to Hudson, WI. We were attending a church in that city; however, no one that attended the church lived in the city. Hudson is an affluent community and the high cost of living had prevented some of the church members from living there. Jenny and I felt that we needed to move into the city in order to break what we felt was a spiritual stronghold preventing residents from attending the church.

There was one small problem, we did not have the income to purchase a home and live in Hudson. Nevertheless, we put our home on the market and waited. Nearly one year later we were still waiting. We began to question. God, did we hear you right? We felt like we needed to sell our house and move to Hudson, but our house will not sell.

One Sunday night, on the way home from church, Jenny and I were questioning if we had actually “heard” from God or if we should take our home off of the market. We decided to take it off of the

market at the end of that week. Within 48 hours of that conversation, we had an offer on the house. The buyers had offered more than we were asking, with the provision that we move out by the end of the month.

Now we were excited to move into Hudson. We were confident that the perfect home would fall into our laps. Six months later we were, once again, questioning what we had “heard” from God. We cannot afford a home in the city of Hudson and our realtor has explained, numerous times, that the best we would be able to do is move to the edge of Hudson. Additionally, we needed to sign another six month lease, for our apartment, in a few days.

All of this was causing me serious mental stress and one day, at work, I went into a conference room to pray and have it out with God. I told him that I no longer cared if we found a home. We had sold our first home and were now living in the city of Hudson. If we needed to stay in an apartment forever I was okay with that. I returned to my office to retrieve a voicemail from my wife. Our realtor had found a beautiful home in Hudson. It was a 5 bedroom, 2 bath, 3 car garage home that had recently been foreclosed. We were able to purchase it for \$60,000 less than the other homes in the neighborhood.

Today more than half of that church’s congregation lives in the city of Hudson.

More time has passed and we “hear” from God again. This time we feel like we are directed to sell our home and move to Tennessee. This blog was created to chronicle that adventure (if you are new to the blog, check out the archive). I can honestly say that I would not have had the faith to embark on this adventure without the experiences above. Each time we have “heard” God’s direction and followed it, we have had no regrets. We are confident that this time will be no different.

I cannot promise you that everything God does will be safe or that it will make sense; however, I can tell you that, in my experience, he is always good.

## **We Have More Than We Think We Have**

February 2014 by Jenny

The momma is finally going to share some of her thoughts! Have you been wondering where I've been this whole time? You've heard a lot from Aaron & his view of our whole new crazy life, but where have I been? I've been quietly in the background (you are allowed to take a moment to be shocked) slapping sense into everybody when they start freaking out. Haha! I'm only kind of joking.

The main purpose for our blog is to try to keep our story documented for our children to look back & see what has happened since we "stepped out in faith". We're hoping that they're going to see amazing things. Things that have been forgotten or are no longer believed in, i.e. blind seeing, dead living, lame walking, seas parting... you get the point. But, we also want them to see real life. I believe a lot of church-ed children become disillusioned as they get older because their parents have tried to protect them from real life & want them only to see God's "goodness". That isn't a horrible thing, I want our children to see God's goodness as well, but like with anything, there is another side to the story. So, when real life does happen (rats, huh?) if all they've ever been told about is how loving & giving God is, they may wonder where on earth he's at when their life is thrown upside down. Is he even real? I thought I was supposed to have a perfect life. Even if it's not perfect I'm supposed to feel like it's perfect, right?

We had this conversation with the 2 big guys last Wednesday. Yeah, we're dorks & we have our kids categorized. The big guys & the littles. We're super creative.

The 2 littles don't really seem to be having much of an issue with anything that has happened. Every once in a while they're bugged because we can't go to skate night at school or buy that super cool pair of baseball gloves, (they look just like Sonic's gloves!) but for the most part everything is hunky dory. That's not the story with the 2 big guys. For the most part they're handling everything amazingly, but every once in a while, like last Wednesday, we need to have some serious venting time. So we went back to the beginning & talked about everything that has happened since we moved:

New state

New house

New school

New schedule

Jobless dad

Employed dad

Jobless dad

Homeless

Living with friends

That's kind of a lot for anyone, let alone children. But, as I said, we want them to see real life, so we've been sharing with them everything that happens & asking their opinions. Wednesday's opinions were "I'm at the end of my rope" opinions. They were sharing that they're quite angry with God for taking their money & their house. They're thankful for David & Natalie letting us live with them, but they want their own house back. They want to be able to go to all the school functions again. They want to be able to go to the grocery store & get whatever they're hungry for that day. They want to be able to buy new shoes when they need them. What did we say? Join the club. Haha! It's not very fun not having much to call your own & having to pass on so many things that we used to take for granted. We let them know that it's completely ok to be angry with God, but don't stay there. Being angry isn't going to solve anything, it will only make you a bitter person. Who wants to be around a bitter person? It's really uncomfortable. You can feel it in nearly everything they say, like all their words are venom. So, we need to make sure that bitterness doesn't take root in our hearts. How do we do that? We think of good things. Duh, huh?

One of the lessons we feel like we're supposed to be learning here as a family is to rely solely on God. I don't know if we're really dense, or really materialistic, or greedy, or what, but the thing we relied on more than God was money. We're pretty sure that's why he took it away. Now, don't be afraid! If you feel like God is calling you on a faith walk don't assume he's going to take all your money. For some reason that's what needed to happen to the Sanders family, that might not necessarily be your adventure. We reminded the boys that, unknowingly, we had been putting all our trust in our money. We couldn't buy groceries for a needy family because we didn't have enough money for ourselves. We couldn't go help at a soup kitchen because we were too busy working to make money for ourselves. We couldn't give people without vehicles rides because we were busy driving to all the places our lovely money was calling us to go. Sad part? We were making almost \$80,000 a year. We couldn't give someone \$20 to help with their groceries, really?? That's pretty pathetic. Now we're on the other side of that story. And, you know what? People are amazing!!! I'm convinced we needed to be here to be able to see what we are really supposed to be. To be a help & an encouragement to someone who is completely helpless. When you don't have anything, \$5.00 is a LOT of money. I think the only way to understand that is to live it.

This is what our talk with the boys helped us remember: Nov. 8th we had \$116 dollars to our name. Yes, we did have to move out of our rental house because we didn't have the money to pay the rent. But, all of the utilities were paid. We've travelled to Illinois, twice, Wisconsin, & back to Illinois. Some people that gave us money knew of our situation, some didn't. We were given an anonymous gift while in WI of over \$200 dollars. Someone just left it at the church in a container in a bag that said "Sanders". Whoever that was, thank you!! Our family all pitched in & gave us money for Christmas, thus the ability to travel. Thank you!! At our stop in IL we were packed to the brim in our van with food from our family. Thank you!! We were able to save some of the money from Christmas & have been able to

pay our storage rent & our phone bill. I had a rash of orders at my Etsy shop that brought in about \$100.

All of these things happened right when we needed them. We needed to talk about them to realize how amazing it really is that a family of 6 has been sustained for 3 months on the love & generosity of others. And, because we are a family of faith, we believe that God has been orchestrating the whole thing. He's been meeting our needs right when we need him to. Do we always like it? No, sometimes it really sucks! We'd like to have it all right now at our disposal. I think this is the part where he's helping us to trust him alone. When we sit down & think about all that has happened, we see that he really is good. Life sometimes stinks. God is good. We talk about the fact that we have peace & it's a real peace, the children will often be the ones to bring it up. They will say, "Remember when we prayed? I felt really nervous & worried when we started but now I feel like everything is going to be ok." So, that's what we do. We talk about what God has already done & we pray. We know that "ev'ry little thing, gon be alright".

One of the things I firmly believe is that the more thankful you are, the happier you are. Not because you have a lot but because you're taking time to think about how wonderful it is that you have what you have. It might not be much, but you're sure thankful you have it. The more you are thankful & spend time thinking about good things & less time dwelling on problems, the more joyful you'll be. This is one of my favorite verses:

Proverbs 15:13

A glad heart makes a happy face...

Everyone needs to see a happy face. Be a happy face!

Jen

## Just Keep Singing

February 2014 by Jenny

Once again, before I share my thoughts, I'd like to remind you all that this isn't to make you feel sorry for us or us having a pity party. If you know me you know that pity parties are one of the things that irk me most. Don't have one in front of me, I might slap you. For real, I might. Haha! We truly want this blog to be something our children can look back at & find encouragement from. We never want them to think that if you take a leap of faith & learn to trust God, for each day, your life will be in perfect harmony at all times. Sometimes our lives play a minor chord that seems lonely and dark, but looking back we realize that those minor chords are what give our life's song beauty. We don't want to play an entire song with those chords, but let's recognize them & use them to enhance what is beautiful.

We have found ourselves in a place of disquiet for the past couple of weeks. Like it's time for us to move on or something. We can't place the reason for it. We're having a blast being with David, Natalie, Sophie & Benson. There have been fun changes for the kiddos. Alex is now the oldest of 6 children. Jack has 2 more people to antagonize (he's in heaven). Hmmm, maybe nothing has changed for Max, he still sits and draws or creates whenever he has free time. Bella is no longer the youngest. Sophie has 3 older brothers and a sister. Poor Benson now has 5 older siblings bossing him around. Ha! There's occasionally squabbles between them all, but that's life. I'd worry if they didn't butt heads sometimes. Natalie is Mexican so Aaron & David have been having a great time exchanging stories about the "trials" of being married to a Mexican. Real funny guys. I'm sure it's terribly trying to be married to such beautiful women. Lol! For not having been raised in a 100% Hispanic home, there is A LOT more hispanic characteristics in me than you'd think. Genetics are amazing.

So, why the disquiet? I don't know. I don't know & I don't like it. I feel like a whiner. I hate feeling like a whiner. I talked with Aaron & he's feeling it too so we decided to fast & pray. What does fasting do? What is the point? I don't know that either. I do know that at one point since moving here I asked God those questions & I felt like he said, "Because I told you to." WELL!! If that's not a dad thing to say I don't know what is! Being the good girl I am, (go ahead & interject your snorts of incredulity here) I obeyed. You know what? I really did feel a difference. I felt direction & peace. My situation didn't change the way I thought it should but following the direction God gave me brought peace. We need that direction again & we're not hearing or feeling anything so ~ a fasting we will go. You want to know another bothersome thing? God tells us to "sit still" A LOT. Who wants to sit still??? Ugh. Why do we have to sit still? Other people are doing all kinds of things and we're sitting here being still? Bleh. See how no matter how old we get we're still little kids? Can't you hear a little kid saying something like that? We need to learn that sometimes God says "go" and sometimes he says "stay still" and both are right. I don't think many people are ok with God saying to be still. That sounds lazy. But,

if we're always busy running and doing and are never still, more than likely we'll miss many of the beautiful things that are in our path each day.

This time during our fasting and praying we felt that very thing, that we need to be more aware of the people and circumstances that come our way each day. Pay attention to each person. They might need us, but we also might need them. For most of our adult lives we've been so concerned with helping and blessing others that we've missed the very important fact that people also need to be able to bless and help us. There's a special connection that happens when you've allowed yourself to be vulnerable and someone is able to help and bless you. It gives them a special spot in your life. They now have rights to a part of your life story. It not only helps you, it encourages the other person as well and gives them a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

The kiddos all received Valentines in the mail from their grandparents. Which, because they were from grandparents, had money in them. This has caused me to realize that I'm raising a bunch of foodies. The littles each spent half of their money on new games otherwise all money has been spent on food. Haha!! They're so funny! Each time they're ready to buy something I ask, "Really? You really want to spend your own special money on food?" The answer is always a resounding "YES!" Because they now have the power to use their money however they want, we found ourselves at McDonalds. Yep, McDonalds. What is it with that place!? None of us feel good after eating there but they continue to want it. Thankfully, we're super mean & they usually only get it when they have their own money. Ha! We sat in a corner & ate this amazing food that makes you feel like your intestines are going to escape out your bellybutton. It's quite the experience & it's less than \$5 a person. What a deal. I begin to clean up the wrappers and containers for the edible fireworks and asked the kiddos to go throw them away. As I show them where the garbage can is, I hear a little old voice say, "You have the most wonderful children." I looked around to see who has such amazing offspring. Oh! It's me. I walk over to talk to her because that's what you do in the south. You don't just smile & nod in acknowledgement. Words like that are the intro to a conversation and if you want to fit in, you join the conversation. She then told me she used to be a school teacher and always notices children's behavior and that mine are very well behaved and kind. As we're talking, her very friendly grandson pipes up and invites me to his birthday party "at Chuck e Cheese tomorrow at 2 o'clock". Then let's me know where he lives and if I look for his grandma's car and his dad's red truck, I'll find his house. I tell them that we live off that road too but a few miles further down. Grandma asks where our kids go to school. I tell her where and that they're at that school because we had been in that district originally, but are now living with friends while we look for another place to live. She says, "I'll pray that you find that place" to which I, of course, say "thank you" with a smile. She completely freezes. I'm not being dramatic. She really did. She froze in place. Then she said, "You, are full of the Holy Spirit!!" Me~ "Yes, ma'am, I am." Gma~ "Give me your hands. \*gasp\* Did you feel that? Did you feel that electric current?" Me smiling~ "Yes, ma'am." She then proceeds to pray over me, in the middle of McDonalds. Literally, the middle. People are walking all around us. I don't know what their reactions were. I closed my eyes. Haha!! I figured,

well, if God wants her to pray for me here I'm going to go with it. I'd rather be someone's dinner conversation because I was praying at McDonalds & not because I was a jerk. She prayed over our house situation and blessed us and told me that God had sent me there that night so we could have an encounter with him. Then she went on her way with her grandson. Said she was going to go home and continue her talk with God because he wasn't done yet.

I hope I run into her again. She's quite the lady. I only know her first name. Patty. Patty, wherever you are, thank you for helping me to see the beauty in slowing down & engaging in the lives of people I encounter. No matter how large or small the amount of time is, I want it to be meaningful. Even if I never see Patty again, she has now become a part of my life song. It's a very small part, but a meaningful and beautiful part. Maybe our disquiet is to open our eyes to the beauty others can bring to our life. I still don't know. If you're a praying person, please pray with us. We're praying for you too.

## Blueprint

April 2014 by Aaron

In many ways our family adventure would be much easier if we could share a blueprint. For our religious friends, the blueprint would say that God “called” us to Tennessee to start a church or some other traditionally accepted “ministry”. For our non-religious friends it would explain that we moved to Tennessee to pursue the next great job opportunity and show that we are recognizing the American dream.

As it is, we can simply say that we feel that God directed us to be here, we are not sure why we are here (except to love others), we do not have a church home and we have no visible means of support. Additionally, we are perfectly content that we are exactly where we are supposed to be and we want for nothing.

In lieu of the blueprint, described above, I wish I could convey to everyone the amazing peace that we feel as a result of living each day “by faith”. Peace that does not come from a traditionally accepted ministry or from an amazing job. It is this peace that sustains us, no matter what things look like. I have had a traditionally accepted ministry and I have had an amazing job; however, I can honestly say that I have never had peace and assurance of God’s involvement in my life like I do today.

I have had people approach me via Facebook, email, phone and in person (complete strangers) to ask what on earth we are doing. As I share what we feel God has directed us to do and the resulting events (AKA calamity), each person lights up and says how encouraged they are and that we must continue what we are doing, because it feels so right. Jenny and I are dumbfounded that people see our adventure as even remotely encouraging. When we step away, from the afore mentioned peace, we think this adventure looks like the scariest, craziest thing ever.

I am so very thankful for the many friends and family that have stuck with us and encouraged us, even when it does not make religious or secular sense. While no one can say that it makes sense to them, every person who contacts encourages us to stay the course, because they feel the peace that we have.

We feel that our adventure will make more sense in the very near future; however, I want to take this time to recognize all of the people who believed, even though they could not see. Your support has helped us to see that faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen... not a blueprint.

## Give Up?

April 2014 by Aaron

It has nearly been a year since our family packed up our belongings and moved to Tennessee. I admit now that we had no clue what we were in for. We have had everything we “needed” but only by faith.

If you have been a consistent follower of the blog, you know that things did not go how I would have planned them. There have been many times that I have questioned if we were actually following God or if we had just lost our minds. I can also relate to the Israelites and their desire to return to Egypt when things got tough. As a result, I poured myself into bible study and saw things in it's pages that I had never seen before. Things like Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David and the disciples struggling when they were instructed to do things that did not make sense. I saw that when God instructs people to do things, they do them because God instructed them to, not because it made sense. I also discovered that I had an American Christian relationship with God, not the Biblically authentic relationship that I had always claimed to have.

Our adventure has shaken our family and friends to the core. The vast majority have been overwhelmingly supportive (mostly in a “glad God called you to that” kind of way). A few have said we are silly because there is no God and a few others have added to the voice in my head that says “there is a God, but you have not heard from him”.

So, you might be asking why we have not listened to the negative voices, packed it in and decide to chalk the entire adventure up to experience. One simple answer: we are still confident that God directed us to move to Tennessee and we are not willing to give up on Him. This is not just my feeling, it is a feeling that is honestly shared by the entire family. Several times a week Jenny and I ask the kids if they are done with the adventure (sometimes secretly hoping they say yes, so I have an excuse to quit...) and want to go back to our old life. The resounding answer is always, to stay. I believe there are two reasons for this. 1.) God's peace is with us to stay in Tennessee. 2.) Our family is doing better than ever. We have never been closer to each other or God and the children are thriving socially and educationally. Most importantly, we have gained true love, joy, peace and patience.

Besides a family of 6 surviving for one year without income, there have been many amazing “coincidences” that have kept us encouraged. For example, I felt the need to search for a specific quote on the internet, back in November, and when I searched for it the first site that I came across was Kevin Shorter's blog ([prayer-coach.com/2012/08/01/update-on-my-stepping-out-in-faith](http://prayer-coach.com/2012/08/01/update-on-my-stepping-out-in-faith)). The blog detailed how Kevin felt that God directed him to quit his job and not look for replacement income, but simply trust God to supply. I reached out to Kevin, via email, and discovered that he and his family are now in China, starting a program to keep young Chinese girls out of the sex trade ([www.josiahscovenant.com](http://www.josiahscovenant.com)).

He believes that if he had not listened to God, when he was instructed to quit his job, etc that he would not be fulfilling his God given purpose today. Through Kevin Shorter, I met Kevin Adams, the author of "The Extravagant Fool". In another strange "coincidence", he also felt the need to trust God in an unconventional way and has written a book detailing that process ([www.extravagantfool.com](http://www.extravagantfool.com)).

Kevin Adams just happens to live 15 minutes away from me and he and I met for lunch last week. The lunch began with little formal introductions. It was as if he and I were old friends and had been attending the same school and studying the same text books. When we began to compare notes, it was immediately evident that we were on the same page. We have been inspired by the same passages of scripture, the same extra biblical heroes of faith (George Mueller) and the same still small voice that says trust me with everything and see the power of God. In short, we share the thought that the Christian life, as exemplified in the Bible, is the complete opposite of logic and that God has called us to exemplify that in our lives. I am not sure what God has next for us, but my family and I have never been more excited to continue our adventure.

When we began this journey, I promised myself I would no longer be God's public relations man (see post "No more PR"). That is why I record these events just as they occur. So far, a skeptic could say that there are all kinds of really nice people in the world and we were fortunate to find a family that allowed us to live with them. You could say the same thing about the coincidences of me finding a person in China who heard the same message from God as I did and then have him introduce me to yet another man with similar experiences that lives near me.

Our family chooses to look at these things as God's hand in action, but we are not satisfied with that. We will not rest until we have seen the undeniable hand of God in action. Power that can not simply be written off as coincidence and is not reserved for a special church service or conference, but is active in our lives every day. We will continue to pursue the power that Jesus promised his disciples and we believe we will see greater things.

## Where Are You Working?

April 2014 by Aaron

I have been asked some variation of the “where do you work?” question many times over the last 12 months. I have found that the answer, “I work for God”, does not satisfy most people. Most Christians would agree that they also work for God, but still have a job on the side to make real money. After all, everyone knows that God is not capable of paying the bills unless we assist Him. As I stated before, money is a tool that people should use, instead, it appears that money is a tool that uses people. We readily spend the majority of our lives, doing something that we do not enjoy, simply for money. As Christians this leaves very little energy for our God given purpose and passion.

I am blessed to know several people who know what their God given purpose is and they simply do that as a job. Essentially, they have said “God you gave me this passion, so I am going to use it and trust you to take care of the money thing”. These people are musicians or writers and I am inspired by their boldness in pursuing their passion and leaving God to handle the rest. Where does that leave me though? I am not a musician or a writer, so how can I follow my passion and trust God for the rest? I have asked God this many times over the last 12 months.

My God given passion is helping people. For as long as I can remember I have been concerned about others. I love to assist a person in stepping out of a mediocre existence and into a passionate life that is full of purpose and meaning. At a very young age people would bring their problems to me and somehow they always felt better after talking it through. I do not profess to have great words of wisdom, I have simply been gifted with a love for people that allows them to trust.

Early this year I began to notice people. Normally I simply pass people in the store or on the roadway, but I truly began to notice others. My wife probably got tired of me pointing out people and saying, “I don’t know that person... I need to know them”. I said that because I had a very strong desire to know everyone that I passed. I could see that each person had hopes and dreams and they just needed someone to be a friend and encourage them to realize their purpose and passion. It was then that I had a thought; I should become a Realtor. Strange, I know, but that is what I thought. In that role I would have the opportunity to meet new people moving to the area, or people going through difficult times, and I would be able to exercise my God given passion to help.

The last couple of months I have been in Realtor school. This in itself required God to provide, but that is a story for another time. I am happy to report that I have passed the Tennessee Realtor exams and am an officially licensed Realtor. For the first time in my life, I decided to do a job that fulfills my purpose and passion, not my need for money, and it feels great!

A good friend recently shared the following thought on FaceBook: “God did not call people to go to church, He called people to be the church.” While I believe in the importance of interacting with other believers, I do not want to spend more time going to church than I do being the church. I believe that being the church requires us to tap into our God given purpose and spend our days fulfilling that purpose. I often wonder how much time God spends waiting for us to finish our stuff (work, recreation, etc.), so that we can do what He designed us to do, only to find us too exhausted to do anything.

## Journal Entries

July 2014 by Aaron

05/11/2014

Today is Mother's Day and Jenny has requested that we travel to Goodlettsville for church. She said she felt that our family needed to be there today, so we are going. At this stage of our journey we have learned that every step must be directed by God; there are no "obvious" choices. We simply don't move, even to go to church, until we are directed.

The service was amazing! They had a special speaker, but the truly special part of the service was when our family went to the front to pray together. As we were praying, a lovely little church lady came over to us and prayed. Then she shared what she said was a word from the Lord. She said that when she was praying she saw our family on a winding dirt road and we felt alone. We were not to worry though because God was in the process of making the path straight and clear for us. Then she said that she had one more word for us. She said "God wants you to know that you have heard from Him and you are in His will. He will ask you to do some strange things, so don't question Him just do them". These words meant a great deal to us as we had recently been told that we had not heard from God and were not in God's will. This timely word, from someone who does not know our story, has served to raise our spirits and renew our faith.

05/12/2014

I was resting this morning, after dropping the kids at school and going to the gym, and was awakened by the words "It's time to go." At first I thought someone had said it aloud in the room, but Jenny was still resting next to me, so I just lay there thinking about what it could mean.

A week ago Jenny had felt that God told her to pack our belongings, because it was time to leave our friends house. This did not make sense because we had no money and our friends were perfectly content having us there. We had made a token effort by packing up our winter clothes and bringing them to storage, but we did not take the packing seriously because it was crazy. As I was contemplating these things, Jenny suddenly got up and said she felt very strongly that God again said to get up and pack. I shared with her that I had been awakened by the words "It's time to go" and we both had a good cry in the presence of the Lord. He has indeed asked us to do something strange and we are going to do it.

05/13/2014

We have been working with a local attorney and had become close (praying with him about specific family matters) to the office manager there. Today I felt that I needed to drive by his office after dropping the kids off at school. As I was driving I had decided against it, but turned in at the last

minute. I stopped for a moment and told God that I would just drive by and pray, but if I needed to talk to the man have him outside because I was not going in. As I approached the office, he was standing in the parking lot. I pulled in and spoke with him about his family situation and assured him that I was praying and that God would help him. It is amazing to see the hand of God in even the smallest details of our life. He truly does have a plan for every minute. I never want to waste time again.

05/14/2014

The feeling that it is time to go has gotten stronger and stronger. Jenny was resting after school today and she felt like God said to finish packing. We only had a few kitchen items left to pack, so she got up and packed them all. We are now fully packed, with the exception of clothes that we are wearing, and are waiting for God to show us where we are going. I have asked God to take the feeling, that it is time to go, away if it is not of Him. I honestly do not want anything that does not first pass through Him.

Tonight Jenny felt like God asked her to choose a house to live in. She said that she would be happy with whatever He chose to give us. She then felt like He told her that it was her choice. She told me about the conversation and we searched the internet for homes.

05/15/2014

Today we drove by some homes that are for sale and discussed more of what we would prefer in a house.

05/16/2014

Attorney friend called today. I felt led to tell him about God telling us to pack and be ready to move (he knows our situation and that this makes no sense). He agrees that God is going to do something big for us and soon. He made me promise to come in, shake his hand and hug his neck when God provides. I have agreed.

Jenny and I also discussed the house we would want in more detail. We decided that the "ideal" is not currently on the market, so we just described it to God. Still packed up and excited for the move.

05/24/2014

Today Jenny found a house that was just added to the market and looked promising, so we drove by to look at it. The kids loved it because the yard was large. They wanted to get a showing so they could see inside. As we drove away from the house I had a conversation with God, in my head, about not wanting to get a showing and waste people's time when we had NO prospect of being able to buy the house.

We had several other errands to do and after that Jenny said she felt like God had said to go back and walk around the house we had driven by. We discussed it for awhile and concluded that it was a silly

thing to do, however, everything we had been instructed to do over the last year was silly, so we went back.

We parked a couple of houses down from the house that was for sale and took what appeared to be a family walk. As we approached the house a man and woman were sitting in a swing enjoying dinner. I remarked to Jenny that the man looked like Gerry the bus driver.

For months now we have been forced to drive the kids to and from school everyday as we moved out of county and did not have bus access. This requires Jenny and I to sit in the local Kroger parking lot for 3-4 hours per day (told you God does silly stuff!). While sitting there we would see Gerry the school bus driver multiple times per day and one day he stopped me in the gym and asked about us sitting in the parking lot so long. I briefly explained the out of county situation and from then on he would honk at us or wave.

Back to the walk around the house. As we got closer it became evident that it actually was Gerry. He called out to us and we stopped for a chat. He asked if we lived in the neighborhood and we sheepishly explained that we were looking for a house and felt that we should walk around this one. He explained that the house was under contract and in a 4 way bidding war. We said that was too bad, etc. and Gerry explained that he lives a few houses down and was going to sell his house. It was not on the market but he gave us all of the details, etc. he got so excited about describing it to us, he put his dinner aside and took us to the house. He spent the next TWO HOURS showing us his house. Every room, crawl space, closet and improvement. He pulled out all of the receipts detailing each improvement, showed me the plans he had made for future enhancements and treated us like we had already given him earnest money and this was the final walk through.

The home has a large yard and plenty of space on the inside to accommodate our family and anyone else God puts in our path.

Gerry has not listed the house yet and we exchanged numbers with the agreement that he would call us before listing it, to give us the chance to buy it.

I am not sure what all of this means. We are still penniless, but we know we heard God's voice instructing us to walk by the house. Also, sitting at Kroger for all of those hours now makes a little more sense.

Excited to see what is next!!!!

05/26/2014

Today our friend, that we are living with, said that the day before he had been giving his kids a bath

when he suddenly felt that God was in the room. He felt God speak specific things about his children and their life path. Additionally, he felt like God said that He was going to be giving the Sanders a house very soon.

Once again we are very encouraged and excited to see what God does next.

05/30/2014

Today I found out that my former position, at Securian, is vacant and, according to the person who informed me, the position would be mine if I called and asked for it. This comes at a time when we feel that God is going to give us a home, show that He is more powerful than the God of money and that He really means it when He says to seek first the kingdom and He will supply all of your needs. It also comes at a time that our resources have never been more depleted. We have less than \$100 to our name and there is a small part of me that is tempted to make the call and return to the “safety” that my old job offers.

Nevertheless, I am resolved to stand on faith and wait to see what God is up to. In my Bible reading this morning (prior to learning about my old job) I was reading about Abraham not seeing how God could give him a son, so he tried to help God out by sleeping with his wife’s servant. His story, and potentially world history, would be far different if he had simply waited for God instead of taking the easy way out. If I have learned anything over the last year it is to stand still and see the promises of God fulfilled. I do not exaggerate when I say that this is one of the hardest lessons to learn. It means looking like a fool to many of the people around you.

06/03/2014

Woke up this morning with a confidence that God is going to supply a house for us. Had a couple of days where my faith was shaken. I had been playing the infamous “what if” game and attempting to figure out how God could do it. His ways are higher than mine, so I am learning to simply trust what He says, instead of attempting to make sense of it (should have learned this by now!).

The cause for the “what if” game is the fact that we have \$18 in our bank account and, after raiding all change stashes, have \$5 in cash. I naturally began to wonder how God can do anything with so little. Additionally we refuse to tell anyone of our financial situation for fear that they (with good intentions) may attempt to “help” God with a miracle. We want to see God, alone, provide. Proving that God’s workers need not spend time soliciting funds for God’s work. He alone calls, He alone equips and He alone provides.

I am so very thankful for faith filled friends that rely on the eyes of their spirit man, not their natural eyes. Over the last couple of days they have continually encouraged me to trust what God has said and prepare for a move. As a result, we moved the boxes we had packed to the storage unit and are ready

for a move. Additionally, we feel like we should go to Minnesota to celebrate Jack's 13th birthday. We have all prayed about it and feel a God "nudge" to go, but can not see (financially) how it could happen. Like so many aspects of faith, we simply have to trust God to provide.

06/06/2014

Had my first working session with author Kevin Adams. We are developing material that will enable us to encourage other believers to step out, in faith, on their own adventures with God. We both feel that our family's experiences will be used to ignite faith in others and we want to offer them the encouragement that we longed to have. We feel that we are pioneers in the modern "faith alone" movement. It feels great to finally see how this adventure will be used, to encourage others.

06/09/2014

Tonight we had a family meeting to discuss the fact that our resources are now at \$5.00. I started the meeting by reading Hebrews 11, then we discussed what faith is. I explained the financial situation, that my former job was open again and that it would be very easy to move back to Wisconsin. I went around the room, starting with Bella, and asked if we should go back. Bella said "we should stay, I want to see how God works this story out". Max, Jack and Alex sincerely agreed with Bella. Jack said "everything is better here, so let's see what God does". I am so very proud of the faith that I see in these kids. They indeed deserve to be right up there with the names of the faithful that are recorded in Hebrews.

We ended the night by watching our favorite faith building family movie- "Evan Almighty". I am more excited than ever to see what God does!!

06/11/2014

I was up early this morning asking God for grocery money. We received \$30 in the mail today, so we went and got groceries. God is good. Our good friends knew that our annual gym membership needed renewed (\$200), so they were going to pay it without us knowing, however, they felt God telling them not to do it. As a result, they prayed about what to do with the money. They felt that they should give it to Jack for his birthday, so they did. At family devotions tonight we had a good laugh about Jack being the richest member of the family. He is praying about what God wants him to do with the money. It is also important to note that we have maintained our commitment to God that we will only make our needs known to Him, unless He directs otherwise. I do not want people acting out of compassion to help us. God can tell others if their resources are needed.

06/13/2014

After praying about his \$200, Jack feels like we should use it to go to Minnesota. He said he was tempted to use it for groceries but felt like God said to use it for gas money. I am proud of his willingness to listen. Using the money to go to Minnesota sounds exciting, but my logical mind asks

how we would get back to Tennessee. Our agreement with God prevents us from making our need known to anyone but Him, unless directed to and he has not directed. I will have to pray more about this one.

06/15/2014

Father's Day. This has been one of the more challenging days for me. I have always been "the man" to my children. I worked long and hard to ensure that our family had sufficient resources to thrive in this life. Now, after over a year of sitting still and watching our financial life line slip away, I feel like I have let my family down. While I am confident that God has directed every step and I have peace about it, I am sad that I am no longer the superman provider. This is yet another role (provider) that was rightly supposed to be God's and I have attempted to take it from Him. It is with no small amount of struggle that I relinquish the role of provider.

After much prayer and deliberation, I am confident that God is directing us to go to Minnesota. I do not know how we will get back or survive while we are there, but failure to go would mean disobeying God's direction and I will not do that.

06/17/2014

We left Tennessee on the first leg of our Minnesota trip today. We will be staying with my parents in Illinois for a few days. I am looking forward to a time of refreshing as they support our faith adventure 100%. Additionally, I plan to get the van's tires looked at as they have not been rotated in over a year and the steering feels loose. I look at this as God's last chance to stop us from going to Minnesota. Please let there be something wrong...

06/18/2014

Had great conversations with my parents about faith, from a Biblical perspective, and have been very encouraged. According to the tire shop, the van tires just needed rotated and there are no other issues. I even prodded for them to check the alignment because I did not have the money to fix it and, if something was wrong, I could just return to Tennessee. It looks like we are clear to press on to Minnesota. Kind of scared and kind of excited.

06/20/2014

It was a long day of driving but we made it to Camp Galilee, in Minnesota, around 6:30pm. We went to the evening church service. The speaker said several encouraging things, and at the end of service we were approached by a man from the camp book store. He said, "I don't know much, but I know when I have heard from God and He wants me to tell you that He is going to restore everything that was taken." He went on to talk and pray with us. I thanked him for sharing and praying with us. It is important to note that we do not know this man. His words reminded me of the verse that gave me such strength after we lost everything ([Shipwreck](#)) in November of 2013:

“I will give you back what you lost to the swarming locusts, the hopping locusts, the stripping locusts, and the cutting locusts. It was I who sent this great destroying army against you. Once again you will have all the food you want, and you will praise the Lord your God, who does these miracles for you. Never again will my people be disgraced. Then you will know that I am among my people Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and there is no other. Never again will my people be disgraced. (Joel 2:25-27 NLT)

It was nearly 2am when we arrived at Jenny’s grandparent’s home in Hugo, MN. There was a note on the table stating that there was an issue with the basement (where we were supposed to stay) and we would need to sleep in their upstairs living room. I am sure tomorrow, or later this morning, will reveal the basement issue.

06/26/2014

The basement issue turned out to be a sump pump failure and a flood from the overflow. We spent the last several days removing the wet, moldy carpet, throwing the water damaged items away, drying the floors and laying new ceramic tiles. It was a ton of work, but it gave me an excellent opportunity to work closely with my Minnesota family. Some of the best people in the world!

Jenny’s grandparents paid me for my time. As a result, we now have the money to return to Tennessee and pay for the storage of our stuff in Tennessee. We were able to keep our agreement with God to not make our need known to anyone other than Him and He provided. I am also struck by how important it is to follow each “God nudge”. If we had not stepped out in faith on the nudge to visit Minnesota, we would not have had provision for our storage.

06/28/2014

We had Jack’s Bar Barakah (blessing his transition to manhood) at Jenny’s grandparent’s tonight. I feel truly blessed to see him mature physically, emotionally and spiritually. It was also nice to have the opportunity to share what God is doing with others who are full of faith on our behalf. Truly there are more for us than against us. God is good.

06/30/2014

Another long day of driving but we have arrived at my parent’s house in Illinois. We plan to spend the next week with them.

07/09/2014

We had a great week with my parents and returned to Tennessee two days ago. We were nearly overwhelmed with “what if” questions when we returned. What if God does not give use a house? What if we can not send the kids to the school they went to last year (we are currently out of county)? We had to calm our soul (mind, will and emotion) and our flesh and listen to our spirit, that is

connected to God, in order to find peace again. He has provided for us for over a year and all of the events I have recorded above indicate that He will be faithful.

We are still packed to move into the house God will give us and now we are waiting for the next “nudge” from a merciful God who is better than we have ever given Him credit for. Imagine a God who not only tells you what to do, He also pays your way! God is good.

## Journal Entries Part 2

August 2014 by Aaron

08/03/2014

We felt like we needed to go to church in Goodlettsville today, so we went but we are exhausted and ready to give up on this crazy adventure. The things that give us peace do not make sense. For example, we have peace that school for the children is not something that we need to worry about, but the first day of school is on Friday and we do not have resources for supplies, we do not have a house and the friends we are staying with live in a different county. All of these factors should give us serious anxiety, but they don't unless we try to solve them by making something happen. If we simply listen to the still, small voice inside we are calm. The problem is that my mind is not satisfied with reassurance from the still, small voice; it desperately tries to figure out a solution for the school dilemma and in the process causes serious anxiety, fatigue and frustration. Additionally, the only marching orders we have from God are "pack up, it is time to go". I just wanted to go back to being a sane, rational "Christian" that talks about God, attends church and has a job!

It was in a state of utter frustration that we went to church today. On the way Jenny and I vented our frustrations at God and I resolved to give up. After all, we have options. I could attempt to get my old job back or we could move to Illinois and stay with my parents. We told God that we needed a real, clear word from Him or we were going to have to quit.

We arrived at church 20 minutes late, due to construction traffic, and as we walked in the building went strangely silent (300+ people). A member of the congregation began speaking in tongues and a few minutes later this interpretation was given: "I spoke the world and universe into existence and I am aware of your situation. You feel that your circumstances are impossible, but I PROMISE YOU that I will handle it if you will allow me to." It was as if these words were spoken directly into our hearts and we were instantly refreshed. The service continued and we left feeling very encouraged, as well as determined to follow God where our trust is without borders.

08/04/2014

Today we decided to rest as we intend to pack our suitcases, clear out the rooms at our friend's house and "go" as that is the only direction we have from God. Our spirits are high.

08/05/2014

We packed the van with the last few items that needed to be moved to storage and took them to our storage unit, then we packed our suitcases and loaded the van up. We scheduled a house showing (after all, God told Jenny to pick a house) for the afternoon and planned to stay in our van until God told us where to go.

In the afternoon we prayed with our friends, thanked them for housing us and left to see the house. We looked at the house, prayed for the occupants and that the house would sell quickly, then we went to a local parking lot to wait on God. While we waited a couple came out to a dead battery, so we gave them a jump start, but outside of that, nothing spectacular happened. It is as if God got busy doing something else and has chosen to ignore this little band of crazy people. We are sleeping in our van tonight.

08/06/2014

A horrible night's sleep! No one, besides Bella, slept more than a couple of hours and we were up by 5:30am. We went to the local Rec. Center to shower, etc. and then we spent the day by the pool. It was nice to be clean and relax, but the lack of sleep and direction from God was causing me to despair. Additionally, I was pulled over for expired license tabs (need to renew but I do not have a residence...). I just received a warning. Amazingly, the kids and Jenny have been full of faith all day. In the late afternoon our friends, from Franklin, texted and invited us over. I was reluctant to go as I wanted to wait until God spoke to us, but the thought of air conditioning and comfort of a home was too much, so we agreed to stop by for a visit. They were so kind and offered us loving care, food and insisted that we stay the night. I was too exhausted to protest, so we are sleeping in their home tonight.

08/07/2014

We slept in today and felt better as a result of sleep. I had the opportunity to talk, at length, with my friend and felt refreshed, but still frustrated with God's lack of communication. We were invited to another friend's home in Spring Hill for dinner, so we went there in the evening. They also insisted that we spend the night, so we did. We stayed up late discussing the pure insanity of "following God" but all agreed that there was peace from doing so. Just before bed, I went outside to get something from my van and walked right into God (no other way to describe it). I felt like he simply asked me to worship him. I was more inclined to poke Him in the nose and ask where he had been for the last two days while my family and I were living like gypsies, but I simply dropped to my knees and worshiped. It felt good.

08/08/2014

Woke up at 2am to a text from my mom advising me that my grandmother had a heart attack. It is as if God is allowing the pressure cooker to heat to the boiling point. We were directed to pack up and told that it was time to go, so we went. As a result, we are homeless vagabonds living out of our van and now my grandmother's health is failing and I can't even go see her. What does God have to say about all of this? "Worship me." God is talking but he is not saying anything that we want to hear. The first half day of school is today and, as of this morning, we have no money for supplies or house to justify their attendance in the schools that they are registered in.

Our friends from Franklin have a son getting married tomorrow and we have volunteered to help with the groom's dinner tonight. We have no money for gas and just enough to get to the venue and back to Spring Hill, so we needed to decide to either assist at the groom's dinner or go to the wedding tomorrow. Since we would be the most use at the groom's dinner, we decided to go there. Shortly after that decision, we were given \$500, completely unsolicited. This allowed us to get some food, pay our phone bill, attend the wedding as well as the groom's dinner and buy school supplies. The kids did not get to attend the first half day of school though.

On the way to the groom's dinner we once again encountered God (no good way to describe it, sorry) but we felt He was acknowledging our family's passion to wrestle with Him for His blessing. We had a wonderful time serving at the groom's dinner and met some amazing people. We were also able to bless others who had a financial need. Overall, it was a good day. God talked (although He did not say what we wanted to hear), God provided and we were able to be a blessing.

08/09/2014

We attended the wedding today and had a great time.

08/10/2014

We went to a local church with some friends and found the worship and message refreshing, but we are frustrated again about feeling peace, when our kids can not attend school (out of county issue). After much debate and reasoning we decided to send them to school tomorrow. After all, they are registered, expected to be there and we could get creative with what we told them about our living situation. I confess that this is not directed by my spirit, but by my logic.

08/11/2014

Woke the kids up early, got dressed and started out for school. Alex, Jack, Jenny and I were so heavy in our spirits about going that we just wanted to cry. The boys agreed that it made sense that they go; their friends are expecting them and they want to go, but they can not say that God wants them to go. Jenny

and I feel the same way, so we simply drove to a local parking lot and are waiting for direction from God.

In the late morning I emailed all three school principals explaining that we had to move from our rented home and were living with friends. It felt good to be honest, but I was concerned about what might happen. The Middle school principal contacted us right away and assured us that she would champion our case to the county school board and told us she would call us back with specific direction.

08/12/2014

We heard from the middle school principal this morning. She advised us to simply bring the kids to school and she would work out the behind the scenes details. It was too late to bring them today, so they will officially start tomorrow.

We also moved back in with our dear friends, so we are no longer van dwelling vagabonds. We finished the school supply shopping and are ready for a good night's sleep (in comfortable beds!) and the first full day of school.

08/13/2014

The school day went amazingly! Alex had friends that meet him at the high school and showed him the ropes. Jack acted as mentor and guide to Max in middle school and Bella was met with cheers and excitement from students and teachers. God is good.

As I reflect on the last seven days, I can clearly see that God was up to something. It was not what I expected (we move out and He gives us our house, etc.), but it was just what was needed. We had a chance to bond more closely with others in our circle of friends, we were financially blessed by over \$1,600 (the majority miraculously came from a government entity and was completely unsolicited), our children are able to attend the school of their choice, our license plate tabs are renewed in the correct county and, finally, we learned that our hope should be in God, not in what He will do for us. We got frustrated with Him because He was not doing what we wanted Him to (give us a house), and we failed to see that He was doing exactly what we needed.

Now that all of those details are in order, I am ready to pour myself into my work with author Kevin Adams. He and I share a passion for awakening the modern Christian to the amazing power and provision that faith alone can bring, and I am more passionate than ever to see that vision accomplished. I plan to write a blog post about that "ministry" (I don't like that churchie word, but it fits) in the coming days.

## When God Disappoints

September 2014

In the beginning, I felt that God wanted me to blog our adventure because it needed to be documented for my children to look back on and also for encouragement and edification of fellow Christians. I was very excited about it and promised God that I would be completely honest and transparent. Then things started going “bad”. I say bad, with quotes, because we felt that God was telling us that we needed to experience loss and that we would gain more than we gave up. Additionally, we felt that God would sustain us and show us who we are and what his purpose is for us in this life. From that perspective, what we called bad was actually the best thing that could happen.

After living in Tennessee for 16 months, Jenny and I have clarity, regarding God’s purpose, like never before. As a result, we now spend our days fulfilling our purpose in God’s kingdom. We no longer have the feeling of divided loyalties between who we say we are, in Christian circles, and who we are in “normal” life. Our life is following Christ, nothing more and nothing less. We have chosen to believe Matthew 6:33 and we pour ourselves into our kingdom purpose, while trusting God for our needs.

You may wonder why I am writing about disappointment, after reading how we believe God has done everything for a reason and has shown us our purpose. I am writing on this subject because I had an overly romanticized idea of what God was doing in our life. Modern, church going people (myself included) are very excited to talk about being a “book of Acts church” or “first century believers, in the 21st century”, but when I actually experienced it, I was disappointed. When we lost everything, a wonderful God filled man and his family approached us and said the following:

“God told us 2 months ago that you would be living with us. At the time, we thought that He meant we would buy property together or something (we both had plenty of money at the time), but now we see that He meant you are to come and live with us now.”

As a result, my family and I have experienced the “book of Acts church”, having all things in common and no one being without. We have also experienced what Paul wrote about, in I Corinthians 14:26, first hand. We can simply be sitting around enjoying dinner and get a word of instruction or enjoy an original hymn that was freshly written as a result of a life lived in God’s will. We no longer simply “go” to church (although we enjoy every chance to), we ARE the church.

The Biblical concepts I detail above make great fodder for a Sunday sermon but, when they are lived out in a practical way, they are not received well by the modern Christian (myself included). The lifestyle I described above has caused us to lose most of our church friends, and family members now consider us heretics. They are not alone in this, as I too confess to being frustrated with what God is

doing and angry at God for not meeting my romanticized idea of how he could show himself powerful in my life. As a result of my anger and frustration, I went back to the Bible in an effort to find my romanticized version of God's provision, wave it in his face and hold him to it. What I found caused me to be disappointed in myself, not God.

I found the heroes of faith experiencing the same disappointments that I did.

– Abraham was promised a child in his old age and when God did not come through, as expected, Abraham handled the situation himself.

-David was anointed king of Israel and then chased into hiding. Imagine the disappointment and second guessing that occurred in the mind of David and Samuel. Samuel may have questioned if he really was supposed to have anointed David.

– Consider Elijah. God tells him that a drought is coming and that he is supposed to wait at a creek and be fed by ravens, until the creek dries up. Then he is to go to a widow's home and take the last of her food for himself. Talk about disappointing! Our romanticized Christian minds could have come up with something far better than that, right?

The Bible is positively full of examples of God's ways disappointing human ways, but I want to highlight one more for the purpose of this post. The life of Jesus. He healed the sick, raised the dead, taught like no other and then was killed. How disappointing to his followers. They were disappointed, because they could not see the bigger picture. The temporary loss was far outweighed by the eternal gain.

All of this leaves me repentant. I am sorry for growing angry at God because he is not doing what makes sense to me and I am thankful that I now get the opportunity to "count it all joy" when fiery times come. I have resolved to lean into what God is doing, instead of fighting against it. He knows what my family and I need, so I am no longer going to give him my romanticized ideas of what he should do. I am simply going to enjoy my purpose, love others more and live the life he gives me to the best of my ability.

## The Year In Review (Aaron's Perspective)

January 2015

January is a time of reflection and since I promised God that I would share our family adventure, via this blog, I want to take a moment to share my reflections on the previous year. Jenny will also be sharing a post, with her reflections, in the coming days.

If you have been following our story, you know that a couple of days prior to Christmas 2013, my family and I were forced to move out of our rented home. Thankfully, God had spoken to a lovely family, a few of months before, and told them that the Sanders family would be living with them. They lovingly welcomed us in and provided food, shelter, comfort and friendship for all of 2014. We have lived on manna from heaven and are very thankful.

You might feel that this provision was the perfect opportunity for our family to be able to recover financially. With no expenses, we could get jobs, work hard, save money and be on our feet again in 2015. That is exactly what I thought. The problem with that plan is that our family has made an agreement with each other, and with God, to only do what we feel God directs us to do. To my chagrin, he was not directing us to the obvious things. We felt that he still wanted to show our generation that he is more powerful than the god of money.

From the first day that we lost everything (November 2013), we felt that God told us that we are not to get a job or pursue government assistance. Any logical thinking person, with less than \$100 to their name and no prospects of more, would have been actively pursuing both. Because of our agreement, we obeyed and instead of getting government assistance or jobs, we spent our days praying, Bible reading and allowing God to overhaul our thought process. Since I was raised as a pastor's son, attended a private Christian school, went to a Bible College and spent several years as a counseling pastor, I was not a stranger to the Bible or prayer. The desperation of our situation caused me to read my Bible and pray like never before. I was no longer reading the Bible to understand the hidden mysteries of Hebrew and Greek words or to have a great lesson to teach someone, I was reading it to find out who God is. I was no longer praying out of a need to be disciplined, I prayed in order to become a sheep that clearly heard and knew the Shepherd's voice.

As a result, my family and I began to see the God of the Bible come alive like never before. We learned that we had accepted lies about him. The lies prevented us from living a life for God and made us a slave to fear. Our Bible reading showed us that he is better than we ever gave him credit for and that his ways really are not our ways. We also saw, with a fresh perspective, how God treats those he calls to greatness. The lives of Abraham, Joseph, David, Old Testament prophets and New Testament disciples showed that when God calls someone to greatness, he also takes the time to equip them for the task.

His equipping is not easy and leaves the person feeling lost and alone (see Psalm 22). Moses' wilderness, Joseph's prison cell and David's cave were all God's strange equipping places for the great tasks that he had called them to.

So, when I reflect on the last year, I can honestly say that I would not trade any of it. We gained far more than we gave up and our family experienced love, joy and peace like we have never known. Our children are also doing better spiritually, academically and socially than they ever have.

Just to be clear, I am not saying that the last year has been easy. It has been the most challenging of our life. We had to allow God to completely alter our understanding of him, while we were financially destitute and relying on God, alone, to direct the supplying of our needs. That sounds good when you read it in the book of Acts (Saul's conversion) or hear it in a Sunday sermon but, let me assure you, it feels HORRIBLE when you are the one living it out! When God does not provide for Christmas presents or birthday presents or your favorite snack, you don't get them. Hardly a day passed where I did not contemplate quitting this insane journey and going back to "normal" life. I honestly would have quit if it were not for my amazing family. The kids never lost faith and they refused to allow me to. If I got down, they would say, "lets just give God one more week". I would tell them that I feel crazy and they would tell me that we are following God and the Bible, so what everyone else is doing was crazy, we are the "normal" ones. I love those kids!

As frustrating as it was, God always provided. How he did it, and through whom, was completely unexpected. You would expect God to use other Christians, but that was not always the case. Strangers were led to help us, banks "reviewed their records" and found that they owed us money and the government "reviewed tax records" and found that they owed us money. When people would approach us to help, we would ask "Did God tell you to do this?" If the answer was "No, but you need it", we politely refused. We did not accept anything that did not come directly from the hand of God. As a result, a family of 6 has survived for 13 months only on what God specifically directed others to provide. It has truly been a humbling experience.

We also have great friends that would take us out to dinner, or a movie, or take Jenny to get her nails done. That allowed us to experience "normal" life, from time to time, and we treasured each of those moments. We got to see the true, Biblical Church in action and the God of the Bible active in our lives on a daily basis. Those are the priceless gifts that I am thankful for. We still believe that God wants to show the American Christian that his people really can seek first the kingdom and he really will take care of their needs.

## **The Year In Review (Jenny's Perspective)**

January 2015

2014 was definitely a year of the unexpected for our family. When I was thinking of chapter titles, for the book we want to write, I thought “A Year of Rest” would be a good title to sum up this last year. We had felt God prompting us many times to rest in him and to be still and trust him. And we did, AFTER we got angry and frustrated or threw ourselves on the ground and sobbed until there were no more sobs (the sobbing fit was me, Aaron was the angry one.). Thus, I have to admit that “A Year of Rest” would not be the most accurate of titles to describe this last year. Maybe, “How to Freak out When God Doesn’t do What You Think He Should” or “How to Pout Like a Three Year Old When You’re in Your 30’s” or “The Art of Looking Like an Idiot”.

In spite of the struggles, and seemingly hopeless situations, we wouldn’t change anything that happened because of what we have learned. All of this craziness has opened our eyes to the people we were and it wasn’t anything close to the people we’re meant to be. Oh, we were nice enough, but we’re meant to be more than nice enough. We had to go through a complete stripping process for God to be able to reveal the plans he has for us as individuals as well as how he will use us to encourage others. It really will take a whole book, or two or three, to share all the things we’ve learned and how they’ve changed us. These are just a few of the things that come to mind:

### **God is meaner than we thought, and better than we can imagine.**

Because I’m married to one of the biggest fitness nuts ever, I translate a lot of life’s lessons into health and fitness scenarios. For example, we go to God wanting him to be our workout partner, and we ask him to join us for nice little walks. For a time that’s great, you can’t jump into a hardcore fitness routine if you get sore and winded from a short walk. Fitness is a continual process. Once you have been walking for awhile, you will need to increase the resistance in order to reach your goals. It is at this point that you need a personal trainer, not a workout partner. God wants to be our personal trainer. He already has all the knowledge for what steps are necessary to transform each person. We need to trust that whatever he’s asking us to do, or to give up, is necessary for our transformation. As with any personal training, at times you’ll think all of it is ridiculous and you’ll want to quit. You’ll look at all the people doing and having things you can’t and it’ll make you mad and frustrated at that ridiculous trainer. But, if you’ll stick to it, through your anger and pain, the results will amaze you and everyone around you. You’ll come to a point where that personal trainer becomes your hero and you thank him continually for being “mean” and requiring things of you that you didn’t think you had.

### **Stepping out in faith has results that are not immediately positive.**

We had a completely different story written in our heads for what would happen when we moved to Tennessee. We thought that since we were trusting God to direct our steps everything would fall into

place. Sure, we'd have the typical life struggles but we'd find our place in working for him and encouraging people and we'd be fulfilled in that. We didn't realize that to get to that point we had to have our world completely crumble. I think it shocked everyone watching our story, as much as it shocked us. We told God when we got to Tennessee that we'd write everything that happened in our life so that people could read about the great things he does and rejoice with us. So far there hasn't been much rejoicing. It's tough to live this out, but it's also tough for our friends and family to watch. That is something that we had never taken into consideration. It has caused a crisis of faith for many. People don't know what to think. Could the Sanders really be walking in faith if all these terrible things are happening to them? Did they really hear from him in the first place? Does God really do these kinds of things? Our life has caused us, and many of our friends, to look deeper into the character of God to figure out what on earth is going on.

### **Help and encouragement come from unexpected sources.**

Aaron has mentioned before that if he'd have made a list of people that would be our source of encouragement and help he would have been way off. We've been pleasantly surprised at who God has used. Friends and family, that we had no idea had a relationship with God, have sent us texts and emails letting us know they're proud of us and they believe in us or they'll send encouraging Bible verses. People that we've talked to less than a handful of times will come to us and say they felt like God wanted them to give us a certain amount of money. People that we've never met have given money to people we do know and told them it is for us.

### **Letting people help you is hard and incredibly humbling.**

Allowing others to help us has been very difficult. For most of our married life we had been the ones able to help people. If we were out to eat and someone offered to buy our meal, we could politely refuse and be able to take care of it on our own. If someone needed help with groceries, we could be there for them. If someone needed somewhere to stay, we could offer our home. To be the ones in need of assistance, is one of the most humbling things we have ever been through. To be in a place where we need to allow people to buy our groceries, or give us a place to live, or buy gas for our van is a little overwhelming. It has also been an eye opener for us. By never allowing others to help you, you are robbing them of the blessing of being a help. A few times over this last year we've had a little bit extra and have been able to use it to help someone else. It was an amazing feeling! If you're always refusing help and letting others know "you've got it" you're preventing them from experiencing the joy of giving to others.

### **We have the most amazing children. Ever.**

We started our journey a little differently than most people would. The kiddos have been included in every big decision and we ask for their input, feelings and God thoughts on each one. We have never done anything unless everyone is in agreement. We decided from the start that this is as much their story as it is ours, so they should have a say in it. We'll often ask, "What would you do if you were the daddy or momma?" They know when a bill is overdue and our bank account shows less than 2 digits or

when we're discouraged and feel like giving up. They also know when we've been given enough to cover all bills and have some left over to go to Chick fil A or when we're feeling amazingly hopeful and encouraged. Countless times we have sat down as a family and Aaron and I have admitted to wanting to throw it all in and go back to living a safe, predictable life. These precious little blessings of ours will say, "Why don't you give God a little more time and see if he'll say anything or send someone to help." We never cease to be amazed and encouraged by their faith.

**Aaron is awesome.**

I guess that isn't really a new thing I learned, I've known it for 18+ years now, but it has been reaffirmed time and again over this last year. His faith and confidence in God has given me hope and helped me through times of despair. When I've been completely overwhelmed and had no energy left, for anything or anyone, he has simply held me and let me cry. When I get really discouraged and start speaking negatively, he gently reminds me of our commitment to speak peace and goodness into our life. There isn't anyone in this world I'd rather be with for this crazy ride.

I pray that you all had a wonderful 2014 and that 2015 brings you great joy, the finding of your purpose, the fulfillment of dreams and that you will allow God to show you pieces of his character you've never seen before.

## The Day We Got A Divorce

January 2015

Since our family adventure began, I have been attempting to reconcile the god of my experiences (church), to the God of the Bible. I was under the impression that they were one and the same, just misunderstood, but I have come to realize that is not true. I am not saying that church is wrong, I am saying that church has been hijacked by a false god. I want to be involved in the church that the God of the Bible established to turn the world upside down.

This may sound harsh, but please hear me out. The god of church uses the Bible, and good people, to destroy lives. He is a shifty, slippery, mysterious god that feeds on the fears and insecurities of people. The God of the Bible, on the other hand, is not shifty, slippery or mysterious and he destroys fear. When he wants to speak he sets a bush on fire, sends an angel, a prophet, a donkey or simply comes himself. Even when he spoke to Elijah, with a still small voice, it was followed by unquestionable power and clarity. His methods are unconventional, but his clarity is not.

I have noticed the destructive tendencies of the churchie god for some time and that is one of the things that I have struggled with in reconciling him to the God of the Bible. I have witnessed hundreds of destroyed families and marriages from the churchie god. In one case a lovely young couple's marriage was miraculously saved, by the God of the Bible, only to have the churchie god completely destroy it, again, over 20 years of pastoring.

I have also witnessed the cycle of church growth and shrinkage time and time again. They experience several years of sustained, encouraging growth only to crash painfully to the ground. This cycle happens over and over again (across all church sizes and denominations) until the pastor and his family are crushed and there is a trail of former saints in the wake. A family can spend 20-30 years in service to the churchie god and have very little (from an eternal perspective), or nothing but destroyed relationships to show for it.

The churchie god is also vague and mysterious. He convinces people that the Bible is a very mysterious book that must be tirelessly studied, by someone smarter than you, in order to be understood. God simply can't speak (dead language, it was written a long time ago...) through his book to the common person. As a result, people rely on a person to tell them what God wants. There is no need for a relationship with anyone, other than the Bible teacher.

Then there is the desperate, un-churched sinner. When they hit rock bottom and cry out to the God of the Bible, from their addictions and hurt, he hears them and responds with power. That power heals marriages, delivers addicts and stops suicides. Then that person goes to a church and meets the

churchie god. He/she is quickly taught about the shifty, slippery mysterious god and then goes on to live a fruitless life, riding a pew, while the miracles that the God of the Bible did are slowly stripped away. A very small percentage of people who come to church and “get saved” ever actually do anything to impact God’s kingdom. Most simply stop doing bad things, but they never use their unique gifts and callings to turn the world upside down. They are satisfied with no longer sinning. I don’t care how many people the revival or alter call brings in, if people are not stepping into an active, life changing relationship, it does not matter.

All of this has caused us to declare that the Sanders family has officially divorced the churchie god. We choose, instead, to place our lives firmly in the hands of the God of the Bible, alone. As a result, we expect him to speak clearly, move miraculously and write a living epistle with our lives. No more vicious, unproductive cycles and no more destroyed marriages or families.

What does that look like? According to the Bible, his plans are ludicrous. For example:

- “Build a boat, there is a flood coming that will cover the entire earth”- God
- “Moses, go to the most powerful empire in the known world and tell them to free all of their slave workforce.”- God
- “Leave your family fishing business and follow me.”- God
- “Don’t worry about what you will eat or where you will live, I will provide.”- God
- “Ananias, go to the one man (Saul), who has been killing all of your fellow Christians and give him a message from me.”- God

No wonder the churchie god has so many loyal followers! His plans are very safe and practical. He says to have a corporate staffing model for church, a fund raiser, a special speaker, or to watch a video series together. The problem is that we have been doing that for years and it has failed us. Success is not a group that attends church, sings in the choir and rarely sins. According to the Bible, a successful church is a group that actively follows God and meets together to share testimonies and encouragement.

The plans and direction, from the God of the Bible, may sound ridiculous and crazy, but they worked for Noah, Abraham, Moses and the disciples. If we are willing to trust his ludicrous plans, like they did, they will work for us as well.

## Consequences of Quitting

February 2015

By now it is no secret that Jenny and I have contemplated quitting this adventure many times. We could simply get jobs, save money and, within a few months, be normal Americans- pulling ourselves up by our boot straps. We are then forced to contemplate the ramifications of such a decision. My purpose in writing this post is to record part of the thought process that we go through each time we contemplate quitting.

The first thing to consider is why we came on this journey in the first place. We were challenged by the question, "Who tells you what to do?". As good Christians, we knew that the answer was supposed to be God but, as people of honesty and integrity, we were forced to admit that money gave us our orders. This challenged us to the very core and caused us to examine the claims of scripture. In particular, Jesus' teachings from Matthew 6. He instructed his followers to seek his kingdom before their own and gave them an example of the birds and how he cares for their well being. The point is, he will take care of his followers, if they will trust him and follow his leading. While these are Biblical concepts, they are not seriously practiced in our western European church culture.

Modern Christians are into detailed planning. Missionaries travel to earn funds, so that they have a guaranteed support for their mission. Pastors weigh their salary requirements, prior to taking a position and the average believer wants a detailed accounting of their giving, to ensure it is not mismanaged. There are examples of people disregarding these conventions, but either their spouse bears the burden of paying the bills or they exhaust themselves working a job, they despise, while attempting to seek first the kingdom at the same time. Several years ago I was discussing this with a lady who had bore the burden of the family's financial well being for many years, while her husband pastored a church. She was preparing for retirement and honestly admitted that she was so busy making sure they survived that she never had time to do what God had called her to do. I do not believe that God's plan is for one spouse to give up their purpose in order to financially support the other, while they seek first the kingdom of God or that his followers must wait until retirement to seek first the kingdom. He either means what he says, when he tells us he will care for us, or he does not. We felt that he was asking us to step out and prove that his word is true.

Over the last 20 months, we have endeavored to seek first the kingdom and trust God to take care of the rest. What does seeking first the kingdom look like? It is simply hearing from God and obeying. Our western European, glamour addicted culture would like it to be more complicated than that. Start a church or an orphanage or a homeless shelter or a ministry. All of those things are fine, if God has directed you to do them, but what if he wants to use you to show a generation of Christians, enslaved to the god of money, that there is another way? Our adventure is what seeking first the kingdom looks like

for the Sanders family. I am not saying that if you choose to seek first the kingdom that your life should look like ours (in many ways I hope it never does). God has told us (many times, in many ways) that we would need to suffer for a time, but he will miraculously provide and we will, once again, have more than enough to be a blessing to others.

So, when we are overwhelmed and ready to quit, we are faced with a decision. Do we obey the direction that God has given us and bring financial freedom to God's people, or do we simply get a job and join the masses in being productively occupied until we die? Once we weigh it out, the choice is always clear. We will stand fast, on the truth of Matthew 6. We will see the people of God freed from slavery to the god of money, once and for all. Sounds like a big task doesn't it? So did Moses' task when God told him to ask for the freedom of the Israelis from Egypt, but he did not back down. Neither will we!

## 2015 Update

March 2015 by Aaron

Since we are now entering the third month of the year, I wanted to take some time to update everyone on the adventure. In early December, the family we were staying with got a word from God. They were awakened in the night and God said that the Sanders family would need to leave their house by the end of the month (December). This message did not sit well with them because they knew that we had no place to go. Nevertheless, they gave us the message. They have been a God sent blessing to us over the last year. They faithfully sheltered and fed our family, simply because God said so. As a result, we did not question what God said to them and began making preparations to move out. I still marvel at this family's trust in God. They had only casually known our family for a few months when God told them to take us in and they obeyed. In addition, we had a harmonious relationship with them throughout our stay. 10 people, living in a 3 bedroom house for 1 year, without strife. That has to be God in action.

We moved everything, except our suitcases, into our storage unit and on December 22, we moved out. This was the second time God had our family evicted at Christmas time. Apparently, he did not get the memo about Christmas miracles. Amazingly, we were completely at peace with all of it. The kids were excited to see what God would do next. Jenny and I were at peace, because we had been in this situation before and God came through. We were confident he would do it again.

The kids were on Christmas break from school, so we went to my parent's house in Illinois. For the second year in a row, my parents and family saved Christmas for the kids. I am so very thankful for my parents. They have not only provided comfort, they listen to us share what God tells us to do and they sincerely pray with us as we seek direction. I can only imagine how gut wrenching it must be, as a parent, to watch our adventure unfold. We spent the entire Christmas break with my parents, and left for Tennessee feeling refreshed and hopeful.

We arrived in Tennessee in the late afternoon. We had no where to go, so we went to the parking lot of a local business and began to pray for direction. I have mentioned before that we have an agreement with God that we will not make our needs known to others, unless he specifically tells us to. We simply pray and trust that he will direct others to assist, if needed. That sounds great in an inspirational sermon or book, but put yourself in a minivan with your family, on a cold January night, and see how it sounds then. I can tell you that it does not feel good. Around 8pm, we received a text message from a friend. They asked us what we were doing and where we were. We explained our situation and they invited us to stay the night with them. We have stayed with them, on and off, over the last 2 months and we are very grateful for their hospitality, but we know that God has something else for us, so we spend the majority of our time praying and fasting about our purpose.

Jenny has gotten clear direction, from God, to open a safe place for people to come and get rest from the heaviness of life. Her vision is to provide Rest, Restoration and an opportunity to Re-start under God's direction. She believes that God has a plan for each and every person and most are simply too busy with the heaviness of life (bills, kids, work) to stop, rest, be restored, and re-start, this time on a mission to fulfill God's purpose for their life. It is a big vision and would be impossible without God. I have also gotten a clear vision of who I am in God. He created me to love and encourage others in their faith. My family and I are walking out our faith adventure and are becoming equipped to awaken the sleeping giants of faith. I will speak faith to people that are called to mission fields (near and far) and they will rise up and fulfill their purpose in God. Once again, it is a lofty vision and will not be possible without supernatural power.

As I write this, our living situation is still unclear and the visions I have shared seem impossible. I continue to question my own sanity in following the still small voice and would gladly give up, if it were not for the many, many unquestionably clear directives of that voice. They are too numerous to detail in this blog, but I assure you every one is captured and will appear in the book that Jenny is working on. I often get frustrated by these miraculous tidbits, because they come when I am ready to throw in the towel and forget God and his silly adventure altogether. It is at this point that an undeniably clear still small voice speaks. I get frustrated because I had just convinced myself that God no longer cares for me and my family (kicked out at Christmas, low on food, homeless in a minivan) and I just need to take care of my family without him. At that moment he clearly does something that lets me know he is with us and he cares. As a result, we plod on.

Finally, I want to say thank you to everyone that follows this blog. Two to three hundred of you, across five countries, read each post and we are very encouraged by that. We often say if we started a church and that many people came every time we opened the doors, we would feel useful in the kingdom of God. He did not give us a church, but he clearly instructed us to create this blog and provide the world with a detailed accounting of a family that seeks first the kingdom and trusts God for everything else.

## Pressed But Not Crushed

March 2015 by Aaron

2 Corinthians chapter 4 is a description of what can be expected of the Christian life. Pressed, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We are also told to count it all joy when we encounter “fiery trials”, because it produces something great in us (James 1). We see this illustrated in the lives of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Elijah, David, Job, Jesus, Stephen, Paul, Peter and many other notable Biblical characters, yet modern Christians do everything in our power to insulate ourselves from fiery situations.

I will use my life as an example. For the last two years I have fought God every step of the way as he led my family into a “fiery trial”. If I had believed the portions of scripture, from the first paragraph above, and the examples of the Biblical characters, I would have counted it all joy to be called out. Unfortunately, I did not count it all joy. I tried to figure out what I could “do” to get myself out of the trial. God, in his mercy, steadfastly refused to let me DO anything.

I have recently been reading the works of Miguel De Molinos, Jeanne Guyon and Francois Fenelon. All three of these authors lived 300-400 years ago and wrote about the need for a deep spiritual relationship with God. One that goes beyond “doing”, in the physical alone. Not that doing is a bad thing (see all of the book of James), but that doing can be the evidence of an immature relationship with Christ. See this quote from Molinos:

*“Those who are spiritual externally seek God by reasoning, by the things they imagine, by long periods of consideration...they endure pain to obtain virtue. They delight in talking about God. They delight in being very fervent in love, and even being skilled in prayer. They are seeking to obtain greatness by doing things. They believe that God abides close to them only by their “doing” the above-mentioned things. This is the way of beginners! Experience has shown that many believers, even after 50 years of external exercise, are void of God”*

-Miguel De Molinos

This quote allowed me to see myself in the harsh light of reality. Sadly, it has taken nearly two years of struggling with my own blinding pride to be able to see my relationship with God for what it is; An immature effort to do things for God. That is why I can say that God, in his mercy, has refused to let me “do” anything. This does not mean that our family will never do anything, on the contrary. I believe God led us into this dry, barren place, pressed us and perplexed us with the intention of making us into a usable vessel, so he can “do” through us. See this additional quote from Molinos:

*“There is another spiritual person, the one that has passed beyond the beginning and walks toward the inner way. Such believers withdraw into the inward parts of their spirits and there relinquish everything about themselves into the hands of God. They have forgotten and despoiled themselves of everything. And not only things, but themselves. You can be sure that such people have passed through great tribulation, and all of that tribulation came to them because it was ordained by God.”*

– Miguel De Molinos

Molinos was accused of heresy for these statements. He was placed on trial, found guilty and imprisoned for life. The church’s official position, regarding Molinos, is that he recanted his heretical statements before his imprisonment. Unfortunately, the court records are sealed, to this day, and no one was able to speak to Molinos to confirm this before his death in prison. I believe that Molinos was tried by people much like myself. Full of pride and unwilling to admit that their relationship with God was that of a beginner. Being a beginner is not a bad thing, it is when we refuse to mature (see 1 Corinthians 3) that being a beginner becomes bad for you.

I have now resolved to allow God to continue the good work he has started in my family, without my hindering action. I will lean confidently into his hand and allow myself to be pressed, perplexed and persecuted, because I know he is molding me and my family into usable vessels.

## Can We Start Over?

May 2015 by Jenny

What many of you may not realize, because we didn't even realize it until recently, is that you're not just following a story about the Sanders family. Aaron made an agreement with God that he would blog all the "God things" that happen in our life. As he has mentioned before, he made that agreement before realizing that life as we knew it would fall completely apart. So, the things we share with you are not just our story. They are our journey of discovering who we are. The drawback of having to talk, or write, things out is that you aren't really even sure of where it's going or what it means at first. It's like climbing a mountain. You know your destination is the top, but you have no idea what you're going to encounter or what those encounters mean or how they've changed you until you either take a moment to think on what you've been through or you reach your destination and can look back.

We are thankful for each of you that have believed in us through our journey. Although this isn't your journey, you've been like loved ones that eagerly wait for news of our journey to a foreign place, traveling paths we didn't know we'd encounter, and finding things we didn't know existed. You've cheered us on, been confused with us, sad for us, happy for us, financially supported us, but most importantly, you've prayed for us. Much of what we have shared has been received as bitterness against church, anger with people we left behind, or an eagerness to leave where we had been. While, none of that is true, looking back through our blogs I can see how it could be taken that way. We left not knowing why we were leaving and didn't know what we'd do when we got here. To top that off we had been assistant pastor and worship leader at our church in WI, then came here and didn't attend church for awhile and began writing blogs about the church not doing what it is meant to do. This has caused some of our closest friends and family to distance themselves from us and for a few to even go so far as to not talk to us.

I'm not sharing any of this to try to justify ourselves or make us look like Western Christianity martyrs. I'm sharing because we can see where a disconnect happened and we want to help people reconnect and really see where we are. To read with no preconceived ideas and to know there are no hidden agendas on our part. We're sharing our journey and our thought processes with you. If you don't agree with us, please call us or email us. If you're not satisfied with what we've shared and how we've arrived there, please contact us. But, remember, we might not be able to "eloquently" explain it yet because we might still be processing. When we say, "that's what we feel like God is telling us" we really mean that. It's not a cop out answer. If it's our own feelings we'll readily admit to that. We're not going to try to have God as a scapegoat for our crazy ideas. He's more than capable of coming up with his own crazy scenarios.

Having said all that, do you mind if we start back at the beginning? Hi, this is a blog about the Sanders family and we do really crazy things because we're learning to hear God's voice and act on it. We don't have any logical answers for why we do what we do. For the most part our answer will be "we feel like God told us to". We're learning to be ok with it being that simple. Our biblical heroes of faith were ok with that answer. If we want to have that kind of faith and see the things they did we should be ok with it too.

Is that a better way to start off? I'm not trying to be cheeky (well, maybe a little bit I am), but I feel like a lot of confusion and misconception would have been avoided if we had learned to be comfortable with that answer from the start.

One of the things that prompted the Sanders family into living the way we do was Donald Miller's book "A Million Miles in a Thousand Years". He talks about movie producers coming to him wanting to make a movie of his semi-autobiographical book "Blue Like Jazz" but admitted to him that his life was a little too boring to be made into a movie, they'd need to liven it up a bit. That got him thinking about what does make a good story and what inhibits us from making a good story of our lives? We began to ask ourselves that same question and came up with two answers that we really didn't like. Fear and money kept us from making a good story of our lives. Our life wasn't terrible by any means. We had a house (that I hated at the time, but would love to have here to live in now), a great church where we were assistant pastor and worship leader, Aaron had a fantastic job, our children went to a small Christ centered private school, I nannied two adorable little angels, my family was close by. So many things were "perfect" but we weren't making a good story with it.

For years we listened to sermons and teachings, some of which Aaron himself spoke, about stepping out in faith, letting go of fear or following God with all your heart and he'll take care of you. I led worship and sang songs about swimming to the ocean floor to find more of God or not wanting anything, not even blessings, only God. These are all messages that preach well and songs that are sung well in the safe confines of Sunday morning church or campmeeting, but when put into practical application, are viewed and felt in an entirely different way. For whatever reason reading that book opened our eyes to see that we weren't really living the things we were preaching, teaching and singing about.

We began to pray and ask God to help us hear him and obey without fear; to simply trust that what he said was what we needed to do. The first thing we heard was "put your house on the market." That's pretty easy and not overly scary. But, that led to us asking "where are we going to live next?" and that's where things started to get weird. We felt like God was telling us he was ok with wherever we wanted to go, but, if we stayed where we were we wouldn't grow into the things he intended for us. It wasn't necessarily a matter of salvation. We didn't feel like he was saying "if you stay your kids will walk

away from their faith” it was more like he showed us that we were capable of more and he was leaving the decision of stepping into the “more” up to us.

So, because we’re crazy we stepped into the more. We left our church, family, friends, job, the only place the kids and I had ever known, and moved to a place where we knew 2 people, had no job, no church and no family outside of the 6 of us. Why? Because we kept thinking, if we don’t do this we are going to miss out on something great and we’re going to regret it for the rest of our lives. That’s all the answer we had. God was calling us to who knows what and we knew if we didn’t do it, it would end up as a death bed confession of regret.

Because we were stripped of everything that was safe or that made us comfortable we’ve been able to step back and see so many things we were missing. Not having church actually caused us to draw closer to God and seek him like we never had before. We discovered we were going through the motions and saying the right things, but we were doing church, we weren’t being the church. The only people in the city of Hudson that were impacted by our absence were about 40 people that attended the same church we did and another handful of people we interacted with at the gym and actually, the majority of people in these 2 groups didn’t even live in Hudson. That is pathetic. The first church walked into a city and turned it upside down. They weren’t only known for preaching about Jesus Christ they were known for their love for one another, for their good works, and for the power of God being evident in whatever they were doing.

When we say “the modern day church isn’t doing it’s job” or “what if modern day church isn’t what church is supposed to look like” we aren’t telling you to stop attending your church. We’re not telling you to go to your pastor and tell him that everything he is doing is wrong and he needs to scrap it all and start over. We’re saying, stop the crazy, busy madness. Look at yourself. Look at the impact your church is making. Are you doing everything you can to help people around you? Not the people in the cooshy church chairs next to you. Look at the people next to you in line at the store, your neighbors, the people you see at your kids’ sports games, the people you see at the park, look at the local food shelves or homeless shelters or safe houses. Do you see where God would want you to go and be his hands and feet? Then go! His hands and feet didn’t minister to the religious, his hands and feet weren’t pierced and bled only for the people willing to come into the temple. His hands and feet ministered to the broken, to the ones who didn’t even know they needed him. His hands and feet bled for everyone. That is what we are saying. We need to stop creating cliques and programs and clubs and mutli million dollar buildings to house them all and we need to start creating disciples that will go OUT, get dirty and even suffer to minister to people like Jesus did.

When we tell you to “step out in faith” we aren’t saying you should copy us and quit your job and leave everything you know behind. That is our story. You don’t get our story. God is going to ask you to do something that will stretch you. Maybe you don’t really like your job or the area you live in. It’s not

really a leap of faith then to leave them, is it? Maybe you get to keep your job and stay in your area but God is going to ask you to give 3/4 of your salary to feed the poor or maybe he'll ask you to open your home to shelter the homeless. Maybe you're just starting out in faith and what he's asking you to do is simply an exercise in learning to trust him and showing him that you do. Whatever it is he asks of you, it is going to stretch you and will even break you. That's another thing modern Christianity doesn't like. It preaches like it does and sings like it does but when it comes face to face with it, it rejects it. You have to be broken for God to use you. Why? Because we've hidden ourselves beneath layers of busyness, logic, hurt, bitterness and a plethora of things that have happened to us in our lives. You have to be broken for God to be able to reach inside and heal those things and reveal to you who you were created to be. That could look like: your world falling apart, people you know and love distancing themselves from you, people telling you you're wrong, people telling you what you're doing isn't biblical, you thinking you have no idea what the voice of God sounds like, you thinking you've gone completely mad. But, when you find quiet moments of prayer and seek after God with all your heart, you find yourself in him and realize he is there and he is the one holding you through the madness. It's there that you find you can sing "we don't want blessing we want you" or "your grace is enough" and truly understand and mean it because you've lived there and know that that he is all you need. I hope you've all enjoyed all my capital letters and underlining in this post. I feel VERY emphatic about all of this in case you haven't noticed.

We pray for all of you all of the time. Even though we don't personally know each person that visits our blog or even their names, we pray over each post and pray for the people that read them. We want everyone to experience God, God himself, outside of traditions, boxes and preconceived ideas.

## Two Year Update

May 2015 by Aaron

It is hard to believe that it has nearly been two years since my family and I embarked on this journey. When I quit my job, sold our home and left all of the comforts we knew, I was confident of only one thing. That one thing was: I knew God. The last two years has methodically and often very painfully proven me wrong on that point. I have come to learn that I knew a lot about God, but did not really know him at all. I was raised on the Bible, attended private Christian schools, read and studied the Bible through countless times, taught the Bible and even studied Christian culture. I was busy understanding the history of Greek/Hebrew words and the context of the Bible passages (all really good things), but like the Pharisees and Scribes in Bible times, I missed God. As a result, I had great work ethic, solid morals, little debt, a great job, was respected in a faith community and had a beautiful family, but I was still missing something. I have come to learn that God is whom I was missing. I have always seen God through rose colored glasses, even by most evangelical Christian standards. I would simply utter a prayer and bang, he would answer. Need a job? Bang! Need a new house? Bang! He was better than a genie in a bottle, because I could get more than three wishes! I would actually get excited when money got tight because it was an opportunity for God to demonstrate what Jenny and I called "God math". That is when the amount of money that came in during the month was less than the amount of bills that were owed. In our early married life, this would happen often and we would be able to pay all of the bills, with a little left over, and no debt because of "God math".

At this point you might be asking, why would you give up such a blessed life? I have asked that question many times over the last year and a half. It has only been in the last 6 months that I have begun to see things differently. Thanks in part to great men and women who knew God, and wrote about him. People like, A.W. Tozer, Oswald Chambers, Jeanne Guyon, George Muller and Miguel De Molinos. The greatest contributor to seeing things differently was my Bible reading. I was no longer reading it as a scholarly theologian, but as a desperate person seeking to discover a savior. As a result, I found one that is even better than I ever thought he could be.

I believe Jeanne Guyon most accurately exemplifies the change we have undergone, in her book "Spiritual Torrents". She describes the beginning of the Christian life as fresh, pure water that comes out of a mountain spring. That water eventually grows to become a mighty river that is able to handle boats and even barges that supply goods to other people. Guyon contends that most Christians are content to be the river that flows through pleasant pasture land. Sometimes the water gets a little rough, but we soon find a quiet eddy to rest again. According to Guyon, these eddys are simply resting places and are not intended to become a permanent residence. She believes God is looking for those that are willing to risk the terrible bashing and breaking of the waterfalls that lead to the vastness of the salty sea. Here the river no longer retains it's characteristics, it is engulfed into the mighty deep. Once this happens the river is able to carry the largest of loads, because it no longer does so in it's own power.

As Jenny mentioned writing our story has been a way for me to journal our faith journey (our “adventure”), but I fear it may have been mistaken as a rant against churches and other Christians. I assure you that is not my intention. If you felt negativity or frustration, it was my own self loathing. Since this journey began, I have been frustrated with my own desire to stay on the lazy river or in a calm eddy, instead of following God off of the scary waterfalls that lead to the ocean. My safety loving self needed to die and my writings are the place that you got to witness his death. No, it was not pretty but it was necessary for me to be able to get out of the comfortable swirl of the eddy that sought to keep me until my death bed.

We have not arrived at the ocean yet, but we are now excited for every coming waterfall. Like the young married couple that was excited for “God math” opportunities, we are once again looking forward to the “scary” things, because they are bringing us a step closer to being one with Christ. Once that happens, he will be able to do so much more with our lives than we could ever have accomplished in the swirling eddy of our safe little river.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 1 (December 2014)

By: Jenny

“Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.” Hebrews 11:1

Going back and reading through my journals, in order to accurately write this “Sanders Family Unabridged” series, has been a journey in itself. It’s amazing how much we have changed in our heart, mind and spirit over the last 8 months. It is proof that when you let God write your story, everything changes. I was fascinated and I am the one that lived it. Haha!

A friend invited me to go with her to help at a charity event called [Help Portrait](#) on December 6th, 2014. It was a wonderful day of helping less fortunate families go through the exciting process of pictures with Mr. and Mrs. Claus, feeding them yummy food catered by Chick-fil-A, while they got their hair and make-up done by certified beauticians, and had their family pictures taken by professional photographers. We arrived at 6:00am and didn’t get home until 7:00pm. It was the best kind of tired!

I called Aaron when we were leaving the church to let him know I was on my way home. He told me he was forwarding an email he had gotten from the family we were living with at the time. They had just gotten back from vacation and the husband had been woken up in the night and felt like God was giving him direction for us. He had already talked with Aaron about it, but put it in email form for better explanation. My friend and I had just pulled up to a new coffee place when I opened the email. As I was reading I felt like I had been punched in the gut. Essentially what the email said was that we needed to be moved out of their house by the end of the month and that the Lord had given us choices. We could leave TN or we could stay. Staying would be harder and require more endurance, but the Lord would be with us whichever path we chose. Thankfully the friend I was with knows our story, so I was able to tell her what was going on and she was understanding when I sat there in shock for a little while. Please believe me when I say there was absolutely no anger. This family had taken us in because they believed that’s what God wanted them to do and we had multiple conversations with them about when it was time for us to go. We told them that if they ever felt it was time for us to leave just tell us and we’ll be gone, no hard feelings, we totally get it. Also, there had been a major feeling of unrest and agitation in our family for a couple of months, so we knew it really was time to move on. Where the shock came from was we had a neat little plan in our minds about how we would be leaving their house. We assumed that God would have another place all lined up for us and there would be a moving truck involved and a known destination. We had neither of those. The majority of our belongings were already in storage, following our 48 hour eviction notice from our rental house the previous December, and we had been living out of our suitcases since we had moved in with them. So, packing up to leave their house wasn’t going to take long, but where were we going to go?

Our other concern was talking with the kiddos about it. We weren't sure what their reactions were going to be. Our biggest concern was that their reaction would be one of fear. We did tell them about what our friend had said about God being with us whether we stayed or left and that if we stayed it would be harder and require more endurance. To our surprise, all four of them were excited and said that we needed to stay in Tennessee. Jack even held his pinky finger out to Aaron and said, "Pinky promise that even if we have to live in our van we'll stay in Tennessee." After our talk we were all very excited to see what God was going to do next.

The next morning we went to church. We attend a church that is very dedicated to following the Holy Spirit and allowing the gifts of the Spirit to be used. After worship someone spoke out in tongues and following that someone else interpreted the words. They were words from the Lord: "I speak to you this morning and I declare I have given unto you everything that you need. I have given you my name, I have given you my power, I have given you who I am, and I declare unto you this morning that you are more than well equipped. You are more than well able, because I stand and I declare that my name is above all names and I will perform my Word." We all felt like it was God telling us that whatever we were going to be stepping into we would be ok, because he has already given us everything we need and that he hasn't forgotten the promises he has spoken to us. He will do what he said he would do. The following Sunday, December 14th, we were at church again and one of the songs was "Break Every Chain". I had my eyes closed as we were singing and I saw a door that was wrapped in chains appear in front of me. As we sang the phrase "there is power in the name of Jesus to break every chain", the chains on the door broke and the door opened to a hallway. At the end of the hallway was another door wrapped in chains. I started walking down the hallway and as I got closer to the door the chains broke and the door opened to another hallway with another door wrapped in chains at the end. This happened about three times when the phrase "I set before you an open door" came to my mind. I stood there and let it roll around for awhile. I knew it was a Bible verse, but I couldn't remember where it was found or what the circumstances around it were. I sat down to look it up. It is Revelation 3:8, "I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can close. You have little strength, yet you obeyed my word and did not deny me." Once again, it felt like God had given us a message letting us know that he knows where we are and that he has already traveled the road ahead of us.

My sister called me on December 19th saying that my grandpa had collapsed at home and was being taken by ambulance to the hospital. His potassium levels were way too high and his kidneys were only functioning at 20%. They pumped him full of fluids and did a couple of rounds of dialysis. He scared the daylight out of us, but was able to go home on Monday and was even feisty enough to insist that Christmas still be celebrated at his house. I was especially grateful he was recuperating so fast because this was going to be my first Christmas away from my family. I was already a teary mess, but would have been far worse had his condition been more serious. We had to forego the trip to Minnesota/Wisconsin because we had about \$50 to our name, our van needed a new battery and was having trouble starting in the southern winter temperatures (it would never have survived the frozen

tundra temperatures) and the tires were bald. Our northern winter driving options were non-existent. We had just enough money to drive to Aaron's parents house to stay with them during the kids' 2 week Christmas break. That opened up a whole new scenario to try to wrap our heads around: the inability to buy even one gift for any of our kiddos. They are the most amazing children, they completely understood why they didn't have presents from mom and dad, and they never said a word, but it was still really, really hard on us. You've heard the saying, "Christmas is not about the gifts, it's about being with the people you love." There is truth in that statement. We have celebrated Christmas without an abundance of gifts, but we had never been in a situation where we couldn't buy them anything. As you know, it wasn't the end of the world, we're still here 8 months later, and they got plenty of gifts from their grandparents. For us it became one of those life moments that you never thought you'd actually experience and it was hard to act like everything was good and fun when we felt like we had completely failed the expectations we had set for ourselves as parents.

We spent the 2 week Christmas break, at my in-laws, praying and asking God for wisdom and direction. We left to go back to Tennessee at the end of those 2 weeks still completely clueless as to where we would go when we got there, but full of hope and expectation that he would have something waiting for us.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 2 (January 2015)

By: Jenny

### Cast Your Net

Cast your net, with all the might of your faith, into the waters of his will.

Send it deep into the sea of his promises,

Into the waters of his abundance, into the depths of his supply.

As you do, you will gather ~

More wonders than you have ever seen,

More surprises than you can ever imagine,

More blessings than you can ever hold.

-Roy Lessin

The night before we left Illinois for Tennessee we sat down and had a conversation, as a family, to see how everyone was feeling and what they were thinking. The first feeling shared was excitement, followed by nervousness. We looked back on how God has taken care of us and talked about how we have become so much closer as a family (that's our favorite part). Additionally, we have never gone hungry and our bills are always paid. When we have come up to something that has frightened us, or looked impossible, we have found that when we continue to step forward, in faith, the fear disappears and the situation either dissolves or is easily solved. Aaron calls them paper mache brick walls. They look so frightening and imposing, but if we'll just walk up to them, instead of shying away in fear, we will find that we can easily push them over. Max admitted being anxious about the thought of having to live in our van. How would we get ready for school? How would we shower or brush our teeth? We admitted to Max that we had the same questions, and that we didn't know the answers. All we know is that God is good. He told us he would give us what we need, so we need to trust him for what that is, no matter what it looks like. We prayed together and everyone went to bed feeling hopeful for the next day and what it would bring.

Our excitement and hope lasted until we were back in Tennessee, sitting in a cold van in the Wal-Mart parking lot, without a clue as to what to do. We didn't think we had placed any expectations on God but, after sitting clueless in our van for about an hour, we realized that we had most definitely placed expectations on him. We were waiting for someone to come knocking on the van window, or a phone call from someone offering us a house or a hotel room, or an angel, or something miraculous. We purposely didn't tell our Tennessee friends when we would be back, because we wanted to see what God would do. We started getting quite frustrated because it looked like God wasn't going to do anything. I'm not sure how long we had been sitting there, but around 7:30 a friend texted and asked if we were back in town yet and if we had anywhere to stay. We admitted that there hadn't been any kind

of miraculous breakthrough and we had just been sitting in the parking lot. We were invited to come stay at their house for at least the night. We gladly accepted.

My friend and I chatted over coffee the next morning and I shared what had happened over the last few weeks. She shared that, in her life, when God stripped things away it was not to punish, but to help her refocus on what she should have been paying attention to all along. I felt like we were in the same place. All this “stripping” isn’t about punishing us, it’s about helping us to focus on what is most important. Our family made a commitment to God, when we moved here, that our life would be about him and about him showing his power and goodness to people through us. Also, that he could do whatever he needed for that to be shown. It most definitely has not looked like what we thought it should look like but, honestly, we have no idea what it needed to look like. We may have been so used to the distractions that they had to be removed in order for us to even see that they were there.

Aaron and I continued to struggle with the feeling that we weren’t supposed to be staying at our friends’ house for the long-term and that, as crazy as it sounded, maybe we really were supposed to be in the van. God does weird things! Ezekiel had to set up a mock war with a brick and an iron pan and then lay on his side for 390 days to bear the sins of the people of Israel (Ezekiel 4). When was the last time you heard of God telling someone they had to lay on their side for over a year because of the sins of the people in their country? Ezekiel was probably the last one, and if he lived now and told you God said that you’d think he was a whack job. I know I’d think he was a fruit cake! But, that’s the kind of weirdness God does. It makes living in a van pretty tame when you compare them. When I told my friend what we were thinking she flipped and threatened to end our friendship if we stayed in our van. She was teasing, but at the same time was serious enough that we didn’t move to the van. I think more than anything we didn’t want to face the discomfort of van living, when we were standing in a nice warm house that had been graciously opened to us.

We were also struggling with doubt about what God said. Eve listening to Satan when he twists God’s words ever so slightly, teaches a great lesson. How many times have we fallen for it as well? We know good and well what God has told us to do! For the time being we are supposed to rest (“be still”), write, trust God and not seek gainful employment. That last one is very Ezekiel-esque, i.e. crazy, and incredibly challenging to obey. It is especially difficult here in America where we are taught to pick ourselves up by our bootstraps and make something of ourselves, busting our hind ends to provide for our families. We have had people tell us that we are wrong and will quote Bible verses to us. Trust me, we have already processed every argument you can come up with. We have been there and hashed it out a million times. Then we come to our final reasoning; someday we are going to stand before God and answer for our obedience, or lack thereof. Are we good with telling him that we couldn’t handle not having gainful employment, for however long, because people disagreed with us? We really had to get to the nitty-gritty of it and ask ourselves if it really is God asking this of us. We have to say every time, “yes”, it is God telling us to do this and if we are wrong, we believe he’s big enough to let us

know that also. At the same time, that doesn't make it easy to live through. Yes, God gives us what we need and our bills are paid, but sometimes...aye yi yi!!! He is sooooooooooooo slow!!!!!! He knows when we have to pay our phone bill, couldn't the money be there on time?! Why does it have to be a week late? He "owns the cattle on a thousand hills" why on earth do we have to eat so much peanut butter and jelly? It's these questions that get us completely off track and we start to freak out. For every freak out our response is, "did God really say not to work?" Maybe it's only Aaron that shouldn't get a job, and it's ok for Jen to go get one. Maybe Aaron could get a night job and then he'd still be free to do whatever needs to be done during the day. See what I mean about Eve? Sooo easy to compromise, especially when you are uncomfortable or discontent.

We went to church on a Sunday in the mindset I just described. We were so weary of not having our own place and feeling like a burden to others. It would be so easy to be done being still and waiting on God and take care of it ourselves. We asked the kiddos what they thought of our situation. Should mom and dad get jobs and get this stupid homelessness over with or should we acknowledge what God said and trust him even if we do end up in our van? We all agreed that our friends' house didn't have the God peace we have had in other situations. That had nothing whatsoever to do with our friends, they were incredibly gracious, but we were not feeling the peace that had been with us. Max was the first one to answer and said we could not get jobs, that we needed to continue to wait on God. The older two thought that maybe we should get jobs, if God didn't say anything soon, "because we need money to live somewhere". Bella said we should keep waiting for God. Then we all admitted that if we quieted our minds and listened only to God, not our situation, he is not saying to get jobs. He is saying to trust him and live in the van. SO WEIRD! We got to church 45 minutes late because we were having a crisis of obedience. Worship was still going on and there was nowhere to sit. We were in serious pouting mode and thought, "Nice. We're not even allowed to be at church." As we were getting ready to just turn around and leave a young girl told us she had seen a spot in the very back corner. So perfect for pouters, right?! God totally has a sense of humor! Instead of preaching that morning the pastor asked for anyone that has a special verse, that they go to in difficult times, to come up front and read that verse to the congregation. For the sake of space I won't put the text of each verse on here, but I'll leave the references in case anyone else reading this needs some scripture to go to in the middle of trying circumstances. This is the order in which they were read:

[Psalm 111](#)

[Isaiah 41:10](#)

[Psalm 18:30-36](#)

[Luke 4:10-11](#)

[Psalm 16:7-11](#)

[Isaiah 60:1-3](#)

[Zephaniah 3:17](#)

[James 2:13](#)

[Deuteronomy 31:8](#)

[Isaiah 61:1-3](#)

[John 15:16-17](#)

[Jeremiah 31:3](#)

[Psalm 34:4-8](#)

[Psalm 118](#)

[Psalm 1:1-3](#)

[Psalm 33:10-22](#)

[Psalm 27](#)

Max looked at us, with tears in his eyes, after all these scriptures were read and said, “See? I told you, you didn’t need to get jobs!”

We decided that we were going to go ahead and step out in faith and move into the van that week. We went to the food pantry at church and picked out food that we would be able to prepare in the van and headed back to our friends’ house for one more night. The next morning we went back to their house, after we brought the kids to school, and rearranged our things so that we could drop more stuff off at our storage units and have optimal living space in the van. Haha! “Optimal living space in the van”, who’d have ever thought we’d be saying that. Ha!! We left our friend’s house while they were working, so we wouldn’t weaken when we heard their pleadings. We left them a note of thanks and some treats and headed out into the unknown of van living.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 3 ( January 2015 Continued)

By: Jenny

Van living was not as bad as we were expecting. Definitely not ideal, but it worked. We ended up driving around, moving from one parking lot to another a few times because we weren't sure if we were allowed to park in one spot overnight. This is not something you would normally need to know in life. There are a couple of parks with open restrooms that we were able to go into and change in the mornings. We all brushed our teeth on the way to school. This consists of everyone brushing, a cup being passed around for everyone to spit in, all toothbrushes being passed up to mom, mouthwash passed around, the cup being passed around again to spit out the mouthwash, mom getting the cup and then the cup being dumped outside and rinsed once we can get to some grass. We also belong to a local recreation center and were able to take showers there. Aaron and I stayed up most nights and were very groggy the next day. We napped in the van after dropping the kids off. We felt guilty for doing so, since the kids had to keep their brains alert all day at school, but we claimed old age and gave in to the sleepiness.

We lasted in the van until Wednesday, when my friend called to see how we were doing. She let us know their house was open to us at any time. We prayed about it and still felt like the van is where we were supposed to be. We talked to the kids about it again and they also said that the van was where we needed to be. The older two said they were ok with the van, but if there was an option to be somewhere else they wanted to take it. So, comfort won out again and we headed back to our friends' house. We all knew we weren't really supposed to be staying at their house and having our kids camped out in their living room made it even worse, so this time we had them all stay in the room with us. We made four blanket pallets on the floor and they all picked a spot to crash.

A week later Aaron took the kiddos to school while I stayed at the house to pray and write. He came back on a major rampage. He told me he had a shouting session with God on the way back from the schools. He said he informed God that he had not given up everything he had and left everything behind to serve some weak ass church god. He was tired of only hearing platitudes of "it's going to be ok. God is going to restore." He left everything to find and know the mighty God of the Bible, so that God had better put up or shut up. He even asked God to just kill all of us, if he was not going to show up. I really wasn't ok with that. He didn't ask my permission to say that to God. I scooted over to the other side of the room, because I was certain a bolt of lightning was going to scorch him, or a big fist was going to come through the ceiling at any moment and thunk him on the head. I figured if he was so intent on duking it out with God he could go right ahead and get his butt kicked. I was staying out of it, safe in my little corner. A few moments after his rant was over he heard his phone buzz. I heard him mutter, "This better be something." as in significant from God. It was a text from a family member saying they had just finished their devotions for the day and had thought of us when they read the

following verses. They felt they needed to share them, in hopes of giving us some encouragement: “We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.” 2 Corinthians 4:8-9. This was Aaron’s inspiration to write the post [“Pressed, but not Crushed”](#). I read further and felt like verse 10 was giving us the point of all of this troubling, perplexing, hunting and knocking down. “Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.” 2 Corinthians 2:10. We try to carefully craft our lives so that all the good things that happen to us can show people how great God is and we have it all wrong. It is through our troubles, trials and pain that he can do the impossible. It’s when there is no hope and nothing more we can do, that he can shine. It is when we die that he lives and is seen in us. It was after this that Aaron calmed down and had the realization that he was attributing things to God that are not him at all and that is what prompted him to write his, [“The Day we got a Divorce”](#) blog post.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 4 (January 2015 Continued)

By: Jenny

I have to interject here, that reading back on our life is hysterical!! We are such big babies! Knowing where we are now and seeing all the fear and struggles that led us here is very entertaining! If you don't journal your life, you should. So much of what we fear and dread ends up being no big deal. But, I suppose that's how we grow. I promise I'm not keeping any of our pouting, rantings and doubts out, as I retell it to you. I think that's part of what makes our life such an authentic story. It also gives you all the opportunity to chuckle with us over our unnecessary anger and worry.

A couple of days after our "amazing breakthrough" (Difference between Church god and the God of the Bible), our friends told us they would be having a week long recording session at their home in a few weeks. The people coming to record were from out of town, so they'd be staying at their house. This meant that we would need to be out during that time. We prayed and wanted God to show us, definitively and mightily, if he was wanting us to be in our van during that time. Nothing happened! There was extreme weariness and disappointment. Yes, it had only been 2 days and yes, we'd already been in the van and knew it wasn't that big of a deal, but we thought God would have come through by then. By the end of the day we decided that we were done waiting and we were going to get our butts out of this ridiculous situation ourselves. Aaron knew exactly who to talk to in order to find a job in the area. I was done trying to be okay with everything and encouraged him to do so. One thing that did go through my mind was something my friend had said to me: Maybe there are times that God wants to see how hard you'll fight to stay where you know you are supposed to be. If we know Tennessee is where we are supposed to be, how hard will we fight to stay here? We had multiple easy ways out. People have offered jobs and their homes to us in both Minnesota and Illinois, but neither of those options felt right. What feels right is staying in Tennessee, but we have nowhere to live! (except that stupid van). Even if we do go get jobs it'll be a good 3 months before we could get into anything because of bank records being needed and money needing to be saved. So that leaves us where we started. What are we going to do? We have nowhere to go.

We had gotten to the point where there is nothing left in us, no fight, no endurance. Have you ever had a child ask you for something over and over, and over and over, and even after you've gotten angry and said "no" they still continue to ask and you simply say, "Go ahead" because you don't have anything left in you except that? Yeah, that's how we felt. We sat the kiddos down and told them we didn't have anymore fight left in us and we needed to just go get jobs to get ourselves out of this craziness. A few minutes later Max started crying. I held him in my lap and asked him what was wrong. He said he didn't want to go back to living the way we used to, with daddy being gone most of the day and then being too tired at night to do anything with them. That simple statement ignited the fire back into us! Aaron said, "THIS is what we are going to fight against. I am not going to let fear or money dictate how I serve God or how and when I spend time with my family. We need to break those chains and only do what God has told us to do! We need to get our children out of this ridiculous battle (serving the God of money) and into the spiritual battles of God telling them 3 people would be raised from the dead that day and they've only seen 2, so they have to find that third one." I completely agreed with

him and was glad he had some fight back in him, but I still wasn't sure I had enough fight or endurance to live in a van indefinitely with 5 other people.

For the past few Sunday mornings Pastor Jeff had been speaking about the power of the word of God and how important it is that we are careful how we hear it. We often blow off parts of the Bible, because we've heard it all before. There are two translations of "word" in the Bible – "logos" which is the written word and "rhema" which is the spoken word. People try to separate one from the other but they are synonymous. God spoke his word which became written. Jeff said, "If you want to break it down to the simplest form, this (holding up a Bible) is God talking directly to us." Now, you need to remember, Aaron is a 4th generation minister and I grew up with a book nerd for a dad who loved to study the Bible and then share with all of us what he had been studying. The concept of the Bible being God talking directly to us was not new, but it felt new. It was exactly what we needed at that moment. We'd been crying and whining about needing God to speak clearly and directly, or show us a sign or wonder. We'd been getting irritated when we'd get just the right Bible verse, at just the right time. We had been wanting something new and something specific to us. Jeff continued, "If we're not careful how we hear, we are only reading a history lesson or a word for another time. We are removing the power of God's word from our life. His word is more powerful than an angel appearing before you. If you feel you don't have faith, you read his word. Faith comes by hearing the word of God. Romans 10:17. If you need more faith, read God's word. God sent his word, he didn't send an angel to rescue or save, he sent his word." Well, that took care of our tangent! I guess we won't be seeking angelic visitations or talking donkeys, we'll be more diligent about reading God's word and see how that helps us.

There have been a couple of biblical characters that have been an encouragement to us during our journey. Mostly because we can see that God gives them a promise and then, for seemingly no good reason, makes them wait forever to receive it. He even lets horrible things happen to them while they're waiting for the promise to happen. Joseph has been one of the biggest encouragements to us. Why on earth did he have to be a slave and then be falsely accused and then thrown in jail? What was that all about?! We were encouraged because he was faithful and one day he woke up in prison and went to bed in a palace. Amazing!

After talking about the power of the word, pastor Jeff started talking about Joseph. He pointed out the names of Joseph's sons. Manasseh – Meaning God has caused me to forget all my trouble, and Ephraim – Meaning God has blessed me in the land of my affliction. Pastor Jeff said, "Some of you are at a point where you feel outcast and you can't go on. Your life is in a pit and you can't get out in your own power. This is not the end of your story. There is another chapter. The other chapter looks like this: the Lord will cause you to forget all your trouble and if that isn't enough, God is going to bless you in the land of your affliction. The Lord wants to initiate this word over your life. He wants to remove the memory of the pain and he wants to bless you." He then began to speak a blessing over the congregation, asking the Lord to send the blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim and asked that the Lord

would work so hard on our behalf that it would affect the next generation. “I feel like the Lord is saying, ‘The buck stops here. No more will you have to worry about your children. No more will you have to live this lifestyle. No more will they have to learn the heartaches and hardships. No more.’” You might read that and think, “he basically just repackaged Joseph’s life and handed it back to the congregation.” Yes, basically, he did but you have to remember we just heard about God’s word being for NOW and then he just “happened” to use one of the life stories in the bible that gives us so much encouragement. He also spoke specifically about our children not having to live the current lifestyle, but they would have a different one. Which I think is referring to our prayer that they wouldn’t get weighed down with silly life stuff, but that their battles would be of a supernatural nature.

Aaron and the boys had been watching “Stan Lee’s Superhumans” on Netflix. Aaron was telling me about some of them and one of the things I noticed was that a lot of these people really limited what they ate and they also meditated. I wondered if that was what the point of fasting mixed with prayer was about. No matter what we eat, it is going to affect our bodies in some way. Maybe the reason for water only fasts are to help our bodies to completely focus on what God is saying to us through prayer. As we were talking Aaron remembered a book his dad had given him when we’d been in Illinois for Christmas. It’s called “God’s Chosen Fast”. It had been sitting in the van since our visit. We started reading the book together, and had gotten through a couple of chapters, when a friend called Aaron. He said he felt God had a word for us. He had been listening to the radio and the speaker was talking about a court being in heaven and that Satan had stood before God and accused Job. He felt that God wanted us to be represented in that court, because we were being accused. Our friend wondered if maybe fasting had anything to do with the outcome of what happens in that court. He was basically calling to encourage us to keep asking the Lord to come through in our situation. Aaron let him know that we had just started reading a book about fasting and what he had just shared seemed to be fitting it exactly. After the call ended, we started reading again. The next chapter was titled “Being Heard on High”. It referenced Job’s situation and also sited Zechariah 3. Aaron called his friend back because he thought it was cool that what he had just called and talked with Aaron about had been reconfirmed in the book we were reading. The friend thanked Aaron for calling because as soon as they had hung up he had begun to feel like an idiot for calling. He was thinking, “You shouldn’t have called Aaron to tell him about things in the Bible. He used to be a pastor. He already knows all about those things, and you can’t even remember where the things you’re talking about are found in the Bible.” Aaron let him know that God had absolutely used him to bring us encouragement and to be a confirmation of the things we were reading.

After we got all the kiddos picked up from school that day we let them know that we would be fasting for the next 3 days and we invited them to join us, if they felt like they should. Isabella said she would fast snacks, Max said he would fast either lunch or supper and Alex said he’d fast for a day. We agreed together that we were going to pray for God to break whatever it was that was holding us back from doing what we are called to do.

## **Sanders Family Unabridged Part 5 (February 2015)**

By: Jenny

“Faith is our personal confidence in a God whose character we know, but whose ways we cannot trace by common sense. Faith is the practical out-working in our life of implicit, determined confidence in God. Common sense is mathematical; faith is not mathematical, faith works on illogical lines. Jesus Christ places the strongest emphasis on faith, and especially on the faith that has been tried.” ~ Oswald Chambers

### **Monday February 2, 2015**

We begin February at our friends' house. We have \$2.88 in our checking account, we've scrounged up all the change we could find in the van and from my coin purse to use for milk and the van gas gauge is almost at empty. Isabella has \$20 that she has told us we could use, we're going to have to take her up on that to put gas in the van in order to get back and forth to school.

Strangely, there is no discouragement or anger at God's apparent lack of action. We keep receiving encouragement from the Bible, sermons and people we haven't talked to or seen in forever. They tell us that God is faithful and that he will keep his word. What he speaks, he performs. We have been finding examples in the Bible, and in modern faith journeys, that are proof of it and have been using them to encourage ourselves.

So many of the words being spoken at church recently have felt like they've been specifically for us. Having been pastor's kids we are familiar with people saying this when they have first begun a relationship with the Lord, but neither of us had experienced it. We've heard messages that we thought were really good or that we've learned something new from, but I can't remember a time when it was as if all of our conversations were being recorded and then on Sunday all of our questions and concerns were being addressed. There have been many times when we have found a passage in the Bible that has given us hope or encouraged us and we have somewhat written it off because, well, it was actually written to the Israelis thousands of years ago, right? Pastor Jeff has been talking about the Bible being alive, that as God speaks his breath brings forth his word and since his breath is life his word is alive. If you come across a portion of the Bible that speaks to you, that creates a spark in your spirit, it's for you. It doesn't matter if it was written 5,000 years ago to people who have long since died, if it sparks life in your spirit it is God's word being spoken to you for right now.

## **Tuesday February 3, 2015**

“The people who are always desperately active are a nuisance; it is through the saints who are one with HIM that God is doing things all the time. The broken and the jaded and the twisted are being ministered to by God through the saints who are not overcome by their own panic, who because of their oneness with HIM are absolutely at rest, consequently he can work through them. A sanctified saint remains perfectly confident in God, because sanctification is not something the Lord gives me, sanctification is himself in me. A sanctified saint is at leisure from himself and his own affairs, confident that God is bringing all things out well.” ~Oswald Chambers

“The great stumbling block that prevents some people from being simple disciples of Jesus is that they are gifted-so gifted that they won't trust in the Lord with all their hearts.” ~Oswald Chambers

“You cannot have faith in anyone you have forgotten. It is not God's promises we need, it is himself. 'His presence is salvation.' once that presence comes, all the inner forces of hope are rallied at once.” ~Oswald Chambers

## **Wednesday February 4, 2015**

I was praying about our needs this morning before I got out of bed. All of our bills are due and there is still no money to pay them. We received a \$50 Visa card in the mail and needed to use it for food and medicine/cough drops for me and Bella. We have just enough left over to put gas in the van for the week. I was going over all of this in my head, reminding the Lord that these bills were due and that we need money to pay them. I picked up my phone to read my Bible and the verse of the day on the Bible app was this: “Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will Guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

Even after hearing Pastor Jeff speak about God's word being alive I wanted to brush this off as happenstance, but I can't. If I really believe that God's word is alive and powerful, then I need to really believe that he can use a silly Bible app verse of the day to speak to me and give me encouragement. I can't take it lightly that a verse like this would show up when I needed this specific kind of encouragement.

## **Thursday February 5, 2015**

“No matter what revelations God has made to you, there will be destitution so far as the physical apprehension of things is concerned-God gives you a revelation that He will provide, then He provides nothing and you begin to realize that there is a famine of food, or of clothes, or of money, and your common sense says, “Abandon your faith in God.” do it at your peril. Watch where destitution comes. If it comes on the heels of a quiet confidence in God, then thank Him for it.” ~Oswald Chambers

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

“For our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.”

## **Sanders Family Unabridged Part 6 (February 2015 Continued)**

By: Jenny

### **Monday February 9, 2015**

In the middle of good days, that start full of faith, there are moments of despair and questions of whether this time of being stripped will ever end. We have many conversations about aspects of God that we never wanted to acknowledge before. One of them being that it appears, when there was famine, trials or even imprisonment it was often God that caused them. He brought them about so that the character of the person/people he was wanting to use could be refined. When we first started on our “seek first the kingdom” journey, Aaron would often quote this line from ‘The Hobbit’ that Bilbo Baggins would say, whenever there was too much going on for him to comprehend, “Struck by lightning, struck by lightning!!” After one of our discussions about this time of famine in our life we decided to change that phrase to “Famine, it’s a famine!” Ha! We have to do these things to keep ourselves from complaining and also to bring a little levity and silliness to our life. Which, is usually easy for us to do, we all think we’re really funny. Well, Aaron thinks he’s funny and I think I’m funny and the kiddos usually just stare at us with vacant expressions. They’re totally laughing on the inside.

### **Wednesday February 11, 2015**

I feel like I’m continually saying, “Something we’ve learned on this journey…” and I have to say it again, yet another thing we’ve learned (we might have learned it before and forgotten) is that we can go from fine to freak out in 60 seconds flat. Usually we take turns with the freak out; this time it hit us both. We decided to just go to sleep because we knew we were hungry and over-tired and therefore irrational. Nothing would be solved when we are in that frame of mind. Next week our friends have clients coming to stay with them so we have to be completely out of their house for the whole week. This means our only option is our van. Neither one of us is ok with that. Are we completely out of our minds? Have we taken portions of the Bible and words people have spoken and applied them to our lives when they were never meant for us? How can so many words, from different sources, align and then nothing comes of it? Aaron decided he was going to send his resume to a place that a friend had recommended a few weeks ago. We don’t feel like God is telling him to do that, but without having any other direction this is the one we’re going to take and God can shut it down if he wants to.

### **Thursday February 12, 2015**

We talked about the consequences of us walking away from this journey we started. What happens to us if we give up? Where does that leave us in our relationship with God? Up until this point it’s been in our minds that if we can’t do this then we might as well just hang it all up and figure life out on our own. I think we were finally able to see and understand that if we don’t have the strength to follow through with what God is asking of us, that’s ok. He is not going to write us off. He’s not going to ignore us or shame us. God does call us on grand adventures and gives us dreams that are too big for us to understand, or accomplish, on our own. He is perfectly aware of the fact that we can’t do it. He calls

us to these things because he wants to be on the adventure with us. He wants us to let go of the dependence on our own strength and abilities and allow him to be the source of our strength. This was my devotional today: “Nothing is so disastrously enervating as disillusionment. We much prefer our fictions and fairy stories about ourselves to the stern realization of what we really are in God’s sight. In spiritual life disillusionment generally comes in relation to other people. For Ezekiel, the disillusionment came in connection with the national life and in relation to God:the people began to realize that God is not what they had vainly hoped He was. The way we act when we come up against things proves whether we have been disillusioned or not; do we trust in our wits or do we trust in God? If we trust in our wits, God will have to repeat the same lesson until we learn it. Whenever our faith is not in God, and in him alone, there is still an illusion somewhere.”

After our conversation and reading this devotional I received a text from a friend giving encouragement and sharing a verse they use whenever they are seeking direction from God. “O Lord, I have come to you for protection; don’t let me be disgraced.” Psalm 97:1. I read the rest of the chapter and was encouraged by verses 20-21 as well. “You have allowed me to suffer much hardship; but you will restore me to life again and lift me up from the depths of the earth. You will restore me to even greater honor and comfort me once again.”

## **Trapped by Little Miracles**

October 2015 by Aaron

A recent conversation, with a trusted friend, caused me to realize something; I am trapped by a lot of little miracles. It has nearly been two and a half years since our family started this adventure with God. In that time he has miraculously provided for a family of 6 to live without income, debt or government assistance. That is one large, remarkable miracle. The only thing that has not been consistently provided for, is a house to live in. That is a big deal in America! You may read Jenny's recent accounts of our life, shake your head and wonder why we don't simply get a job and get back to living the American dream. My answer to that is that I am held captive by hundreds of "little" miracles. Those who know me well know that I am a methodical, detail oriented person who has always taken pleasure in providing the best for his family. Jenny and I built our first home, before we were out of our teens, and have consistently made wise financial decisions all of our lives. This track record makes our current life story all the more curious. We all know someone who has a habit of going off on "hair-brained" adventures, and attributing it to God, but the Sanders family are the last ones you would expect to do that. Yet, here we are!

I want to assure everyone that I am the same methodical, detail oriented person that I have always been and I have wanted to quit this adventure many, many times. I would go as far as to say that I have searched for reasons to quit. The problem is that God has left a trail of "little miracles" that I would have to completely disregard in order to quit. I have often gotten very frustrated by these miracles, because they happen when I have decided to quit and they are so clearly God that I can't quit without knowing that I am walking away from what the God of the universe has asked me to do.

Here is an example: Jenny and I were several days behind on our bills. We have an agreement with God that prevents us from making our needs known to anyone but him, so no one in the entire world knows of our situation. There is no hope of money coming in to pay the bills and Jenny and I both feel that we should make a detailed list of our bills and give it to God to pay. We write out the list and pray together. This is one of hundreds of points in the last two years, where I have had enough and am willing to quit, get a job and go about my life. This "unanswered prayer" (no money for bills) is the perfect reason to stop. Hours later, someone (whom, I have never met) contacted us and asked for a detailed list of our bills. God had instructed them to pay it all in full. See what I mean?!? Frustrating "little" miracles. It was not enough to get us in a house again, etc. but it was enough that I can not deny God is involved. This is just one example, but there have been hundreds of these over the last two years and it is why I say that I am held captive by lots of little miracles.

When we started this adventure, we felt that God had told us that we will not need to rely on a secular job for our provision. He told us that he would provide, if we would simply trust and follow him. That sounds easy, but has proven to be very difficult. The weak kneed god of the American Christian world

has only one solution for survival: Work. That god does not call people to anything that does not involve secular work. Posts like [“Church Vs. Church”](#) and [“The Day We Got a Divorce”](#) detail how I came to give up on the ramblings of that weak excuse for a god. The God of the Bible calls people to things that are impossible. He told Abraham that his wife would have a child, despite her old age. Abraham tried to help God out by having a child with his servant. I am sure that was a perfectly acceptable thing to do, and may have even been encouraged by his friends, but that is NOT what God told him to do. Taking care of ourselves and ignoring the hundreds of little miracles would be perfectly acceptable also, but it is not what God told us to do. As a result, we will continue to faithfully obey and are expecting God to provide for our every need, including a house. Why? Because that is what he said he would do.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 7 (February 2015 Continued)

By: Jenny

“One of the greatest strains in life is the strain of waiting for God. God takes the saints like a bow which He stretches and at a certain point the saint says, “I can’t stand anymore,” but God does not heed, He goes on stretching because He is aiming at His mark, not ours, and the patience of the saints is that they “hang in” until God lets the arrow fly. Stand steadfastly true to God and God will bring His truth out in a way that will make your life a sacrament, i.e., the abiding presence of God will come through the simple elements of your life, but you must wait for him.” ~Oswald Chambers

### Friday February 20, 2015

Well, we had quite the week. I emphatically stated that I was not going to spend anymore nights in the van. Aaron had sent in his resume and we put our washer and dryer that had been sitting in a friend’s garage on Craigslist. We heard nothing, not one stinkin’ thing on either one. No acknowledging that the resume had been received and not one inquiry about the washer and dryer. We had to be out of our friend’s house on Monday and we were going to use the money from the washer and dryer to stay in a hotel...because I emphatically stated that I was not going to stay in that van again. We were frustrated by the lack of activity on our attempt to temporarily fix our situation, then we checked the mail. There was a check in it for \$500, the exact amount we had been asking for the washer and dryer. We deposited the check Saturday morning, excited that even though we hadn’t sold the washer and dryer someone had felt led to send the amount we needed for the hotel.

The message on Sunday was about finishing well, and a video of [Derek Redmond at the 1992 Olympics](#) was shared. When we got in the van after the service Isabella said, “Raise your hand if you cried during the video!” Haha! We all raised our hands. We talked about the fact that we want our life stories to be perfect and for nothing difficult or bad to ever happen, but when we see stories like Derek Redmond’s we realize that it is in the overcoming of the difficulties, or moving on in spite of them, that inspiration and encouragement is found. When have you ever found a perfect story and thought, “Wow! That really inspired me. That was just amazing!”? Probably never. We might not like this part of our story, but if it is going to make an impact and show God’s goodness, then we have to go through these uncomfortable parts. Even if we look foolish.

Monday started with some really bad weather. I really do mean bad. Our first year here in TN I laughed at our first snow day because you could still see the grass poking through the snow that had fallen. I lived in MN/WI my whole life before moving here, and we would get 2 feet of snow and still have to go to school. The difference here is that the equipment to keep the roads clear when snow and ice hits isn’t available. It gets crazy!! The kids were already off school because it was President’s Day. I was going to book our hotel, but the bank was closed because of the holiday so our money, we deposited on Saturday, still wasn’t credited to our account.

The bad weather continued on Tuesday and school was canceled again. I checked our bank account Tuesday morning to see if the money had been credited yet, it hadn't. We had to leave the house that morning because our friend's client was coming so we packed everyone in the van and headed out, without the hotel being booked. I checked every hour to see if the money had deposited yet. We sat in the parking lot of the Franklin Walmart because one of the windshield wipers on the van had broken and we needed to get a new one as soon as money was in the account. Ice was coming down with the snow so working wipers were a necessity to be able to go anywhere. I called the bank after noon to talk to someone and find out why our money wasn't showing up. I was told because I had deposited on the weekend, and because Monday was a holiday, it hadn't had the full business day required for a deposit to clear and that it would show up after 12:00am. What?!! NO!!!!!! I ended the call and cried. We had nowhere to go. We normally hang out at the library or the rec center where you're not required to buy anything to hang out in them and there's wifi. Sweetness. But, they are both government run facilities, and all government buildings were closed because of this weather. Ugh!!!! We drove back to Spring Hill, with our one working wiper, to sit in our trusty Kroger parking lot. We had no idea what else to do. I ran in to get some sandwich stuff at supper time, but other than that we mostly sat in the van. The van was packed tight because we had assumed we were going to be able to get into a hotel that afternoon. In addition to our Viking/Amazonian physiques we had all of our suitcases, pillows, blankets, backpacks, shoes and a crock pot. Have I mentioned I had emphatically stated I would not sleep in the van again? Yeah, we slept in the van that night. Beautiful fluffy snowflakes were falling all around, Aaron woke up every 45 minutes or so to start the van and make sure we stayed warm. We were in continual danger of being smashed into by other vehicles. All the good old southern boys were beyond excited that there was snow and ice and were giddily spinning out and doing donuts in the parking lot all night long. In addition to having to start the van every so often, Aaron wasn't letting himself sleep much because he was worried police would come over to ticket and question us for being in the parking lot all night. I told him to just sleep because I hoped they would come to the van and question us. I'd tell them exactly what was going on and if they didn't like it they could pay for the hotel so we wouldn't have to be sitting in the parking lot. Stupid situations and lack of sleep bring out the snarky in me. No police showed up so I was spared the guilt of my snarky actually being seen. I started reading my Bible and going through my devotionals to try to keep myself from completely freaking out. The verse of the day was Philippians 4:13 ~ "I can do all everything through Christ, who gives me strength." Rather ironic because Paul is referring to the fact that he has lived with everything and lived with nothing and has learned to be content. Well played, God. My snarky went back to the corner and sat down.

Finally at 3:00am our money was in our account. I made the reservation for a hotel and we started driving back to Franklin. The snow had stopped for awhile but was starting up again and we figured we'd better head out before it got really bad. If we were going to be stuck sleeping in a parking lot any longer it may as well be the hotel parking lot. I went to the front desk at 6:30 a.m. hoping that someone would be merciful and we could get in the hotel right away. No luck! To get in at that time they'd have

to charge us an extra day. They said to come back around noon to see if any room were vacated by then. Lovely. Back to waiting in the van. In addition to all the other happy things going on, Isabella still hadn't completely recovered from her previous cold and was now puking and had diarrhea. We had to quickly get to a gas station before we had a nasty situation in the van.

At noon I checked back at the hotel to find different people on staff who were not so willing to be nice and helpful. I was told rather condescendingly that I would not be able to have a room until 3:00 p.m. because that is check in time and that because I had placed my reservation on Priceline they had chosen the first available room, which happened to be a single king bed. If I wanted to change that it would be an additional \$20/night. Lovelier and lovelier. Lack of sleep and overwrought emotions were completely at war in me at this point so I turned around without saying a word and left the hotel. I didn't know if I was going to go silver back ape on them or if I was going to burst into tears. I didn't like either option so I left and got back in the van. As soon as I sat down a million questions started and then whining about not being able to get the room, thus, my family was subjected to the silver back ape AND a tidal wave of tears. We went and sat at McDonald's, ordered drinks and french fries and pouted that we couldn't get into the hotel yet. We had been in the van, either just sitting there or sleeping, for 30hrs. Because we were beyond done with sitting in there, we sat at McDonald's for 3 hours waiting for check-in. I was actually a little nervous about this hotel. We had reserved it on Priceline by the "name your own price" deal so we didn't have any say in which hotel we got. It was one of those motels you see in the movies where all the doors open to the outside and the upper level has a balcony and killers, kidnappers, prostitutes and drug dealers are always lurking about. It didn't look quite THAT gruesome, but it was close enough to make me wary. I went to check in and the owners were at the front desk. They were beyond kind! Very, very helpful and told me anytime I found a deal online that I should call them directly and they would match it and I wouldn't have to deal with Priceline's limitations. We were not able to cancel with Priceline and change our room because they have a "no cancellations" policy, but that was OK, I was already feeling better because the owners were so nice. They gave me our room number and key and we drove to it. Thankfully it was a ground floor unit and we were able to back in, open the back of the van, open the room door and start throwing stuff in the room. Literally. It was still snicing (snow/ice) and we were not messing around with being in that anymore. The room was wonderful!! Pretty sure I broke out in the "Hallelujah" chorus. It wasn't opulent or fancy in any way, but it was clean, mamma's love clean. We got all of our things situated, some food started in the crock pot, and plopped on the big king size bed and vegged out on the Discovery Channel.

While we had been sitting in the Kroger parking lot on Tuesday Aaron was praying about our situation and asking God to show him if we were on a path we shouldn't be on or if there was something we should have heard and didn't. He was also expressing his frustration with everything and asking God why he doesn't speak more clearly. In the middle of this prayer a truck drove up and stopped at the front doors to let someone out. Aaron felt that God said to contact the person in the truck. This did not

thrill Aaron. He thought, “Really?! We’re sitting in our van in the freezing cold with nowhere to go and I’m asking you to show me what to do and you tell me to contact the person in the truck??!!” So he looks at the truck and sees that there is a decal on it that says “Deer Run”. He reluctantly Googled the place, found a website and sent an email to them. Within a couple of hours the owner emailed back and said he wanted to meet the following day. Aaron braved the icy roads to meet with this man from Deer Run. Aaron decided that he wasn’t going to hold back in the meeting. If God said he was supposed to meet with this guy that’s what he’d do, and he’d tell him our whole crazy story to see what he’d have to say. He got to the restaurant, introduced himself and they sat and talked for 2 hours. Aaron laid out our story, which didn’t appear to phase the man at all. Then the man laid out his story about how Deer Run began, and Aaron began to see why our story didn’t phase him. At the end of their conversation David said to Aaron, “Just keep going. I can see where your heart is. You’re obeying the Lord. Keep going.” In the end, even though it wasn’t the direction Aaron was looking for, God used that meeting to encourage Aaron and to open up a new friendship. The verse of the day on our Bible app was Psalm 119:2 ~ “Joyful are those who obey his laws and search for him with all their hearts.”

## **Tuesday February 24, 2015**

We stayed at the hotel until Saturday afternoon. We were going to stay one more night, but would have been left with only \$10, so we decided not to. On our way back to our friend’s house we talked about how we can’t wait to be in our own home again. Alex said he was tired of living with other people because he always feels like an inconvenience. We all admitted to having that same feeling and prayed that God would provide a way for us to have our own home again.

On Sunday our friend needed to record again so we needed to be out of their house all day. On our way to church we talked about needing to get to the point where we absolutely and completely trust God. No panicking, no worrying, simply rest and trust. Because of the weather and the lack of road equipment to keep up with it the road were still, um, adventurous. As we got closer to the church I thought to myself, “We’re in the south. People don’t tough out the weather in the south. I bet they canceled church!” School was already canceled for Monday so I was almost positive church would be too. I found their Facebook page and sure enough, no services. Not only had we driven all that way on crazy, icy roads but there was no service. Our primary source of food came from the church’s food pantry. We weren’t really sure how we would be able to eat and put gas in the van. We all thought it was funny this happened right after our “trust and rest” conversation on the way there. Now our next conundrum was what to do for the rest of the day? The reason we had ventured out in the first place was because our friend needed to record. Most places were still closed. We talked it over for awhile and decided to see if a church that a bunch of kids from Alex’s theater group attend was having services. I found them online and they had canceled their early morning service, but were still having their 11:00 service. They had a guest speaker that morning, but the pastor shared a verse before introducing the speaker. He read from Nehemiah 8 then said, “Some of you are going through things that have torn you down and you’re weary and sad. But, the Lord is rebuilding your walls and when this is done you will

be able to feast and rejoice. This is what God wants and he wants you to share your feast and your joy with the people around you.” So, we end up at a church we’ve never visited, and hadn’t even intended on visiting that day and God uses the pastor to speak to us the same message he’s spoken to us through others: Wait for me. I am rebuilding and restoring. Wait on me.

Thankfully the library was open in the afternoon, so we went there to kill some time. I sat there trying to figure out what on earth I was going to buy to be able to feed everyone for the week. I finally told Aaron that I felt like scheming to make this money last longer was really an indicator that I didn’t have faith that God would take care of us. Not that we would just blow the money on junk stuff, but we needed to buy what we need and when we run out God will give us more. I decided to go walk around the grocery store and wait for God to give me ideas on what to buy. I went in and almost right away had ideas for two meals. I figured if those were the ideas I got then God would make sure I had money for the rest of the week, so I bought the ingredients and spent \$25. I remembered that Target has a deli special where if you buy 1 1/2lbs of lunch meat you get 1/2lb of cheese for free. I decided that we’d go get that for today. As I was in line I remembered that I had seen a Target gift card in my wallet earlier. I couldn’t remember when I had gotten it, or if it even had money on it. Who forgets about a Target gift card??!! My total came to \$9.87. I handed the cashier the gift card saying that I wasn’t sure anything was on it, but give it a try. There was \$10 on it, it paid for that whole meal!!

When we got back to our friends’ house that evening there was a package from my aunt and grandparents. They had sent us belated Valentine cards and candy. When I opened my card there was \$40 in it. I felt like it was confirmation to me that if I will stop trying to scheme and hold onto things so tightly, money in particular, and simply buy what we need, God will always send provision when we need it. Which is another lesson that I think has been on repeat. God is waiting for us to actually get it. For it to be not only a head acknowledgment, but a heart acknowledgment as well.

## Finally A Job

October 2015 By Aaron

Since the early days of this adventure, we have felt that God did not want us to pursue a job. We felt that God desired to show that he is more powerful than the god of money and that, if we trusted him, he would provide. I have also written extensively about how crazy this notion was to me and how I decided to pursue a job, despite what we felt God telling us. My motive in pursuing employment was always clear, I wanted to provide for my family and a job is the only way I knew to do it.

If you recall, from my earlier writings, I tried to find employment for many months and gave up, when it became painfully obvious that God was not going to allow that to happen. It has now been two and a half years since we moved to Tennessee and we have been unemployed the entire time. True to his word, God has provided. We have always had a place to sleep (although, not always one that many would desire), we have always had gas for our vehicle, food for our bellies and resources to travel. All of this without money from a job, government assistance or going into debt. God has provided enough for us to live on, and many times we have had extra that allowed us to bless others in their God adventure. The provision rarely came from the same place and rarely (almost never) came when we wanted it to. We would simply tell God of our need and wait for him to tell one of his followers to help, if that is what was needed. As a result, we have met God followers from all over the world as they have responded to God's call to action on our behalf.

One of the most challenging aspects of this adventure has been allowing God to be ALL that we need. As good Christians, we said that he was and we sang songs about it in church, but we did not believe it. If we had, we would have been fine with trusting God when we felt him directing us to not seek employment. We had allowed the American spirit (pull yourself up by your boot straps) to partner with pseudo-Christianity and form a paradigm that was completely incompatible with God. That paradigm had a god that was so small and powerless that the only conceivable way he could provide for us was via a "good job". Thankfully, we have been able to shake that paradigm off and have resigned ourselves to truly trusting God alone with our lives. When we finally gave up, I got a job.

Jenny and I have had a lot of free time over the last two and a half years. We spent much of that time praying, researching what a life of faith looked like, historically, and reading about the faithful in the Bible. We also looked for opportunities to help others in need. We did not always have money, but we gave what we had. We watched babies, mowed lawns, helped people move, helped small business owners that could not afford to pay help and generally made ourselves useful. We watched the community Facebook page daily for opportunities to be of service. Late this summer, I began to see a trend in the community. People were complaining about their kids waiting 40 minutes to an hour each day for their school bus to arrive, while others were complaining that their children arrived at school an hour early. The issue was the result of a bus driver shortage in the county. Bus drivers were running two and three routes in an effort to get all of the kids to school (some late and some early). I saw different

variations of this issue popping up daily and did not think much of it, until I talked with one of the bus drivers from my daughter's school. He explained that he loves the kids and wants to continue to be a bus driver but the lack of help was stressing him out. I thought about ways to encourage him and help him, but I drew a blank. Meanwhile, I continued to see daily issues from the bus driver shortage, on Facebook. One day I told Jenny that if bus driving was not a "job", I would step up and do it, because that is what our community needs. As a result of that statement, I sent a text to the bus driver at my daughter's school. A few minutes later he called me and said, "great minds think alike!" That afternoon the bus garage had asked him if he knew of anyone that would be willing to drive the bus and he had given them my name. Well, I am not the smartest guy in the world, but it appeared to me as though God was pointing something out to me, but I was ignoring it because it was a "job". Jenny and I prayed about it and decided that I should pursue it and God could shut it down if it was not right (he is really good at that!). I told God that this is something my community needed and I would do it, even if it did not involve pay.

I went to the bus garage and found that they pay employees while they are in training and they reimburse for the CDL and all associated fees/medical screenings. It sounded great! I had an interview and was honest about God leading us here, not working and only looking into the bus driver position because it was a need in the community. I was half hoping that they would think I was crazy and tell me to leave, but they were very gracious and went out of their way to help me get into the training program and get my CDL. About halfway through the first month of training, I asked a guy, who started at the same time I did, about pay and he said that he had been paid every week since we started! Normally, I would have stormed into the payroll office and demanded to know what was going on, but I was reminded that I was not doing this for the money. I was doing it because it was a need in the community. I still wanted to talk to the payroll person, but every time I looked for her she was away from the office. This went on for many days and became laughable. At this point I had been in training for over a month and had spent over \$100 dollars (remember they reimburse) that God had given for my family and I to live on. Finally, the payroll person called me into the office and apologized. She explained that paying for training was a new procedure (an attempt to get drivers in) and I had gotten "caught in the paperwork" and subsequently, not paid. As a result, they were willing to pay me half again the original per hour amount and still reimburse me. That sounded good, and I certainly understood the confusion of a new process. I returned to the training program, with the promise that I would be paid for my training, reimbursement and even a signing bonus upon completion of my state CDL test.

As I am writing this, it has been two months since I started the training program. I have completed all of my training, passed my state CDL test and have been driving some of the most amazing kids to and from school. Parents have expressed their thankfulness that their children will now be to school and home on time and bus drivers have thanked me for helping relieve their stress. In short, I have been able to fill a need in our community and am confident that it is what God wants me to do. Are you wondering about the money? Me too! I still have not been paid. I am employed by the 9<sup>th</sup> richest county

in the country, so it is not that they do not have the money. The explanation is that there was another paperwork issue and that I will be paid by mid November... maybe. I have not made a big issue out of it because we feel that God will handle it. After all, I am doing this because it was a need in our community, not for the money. God is funny...

## **Sanders Family Unabridged Part 7 (March 2015)**

By: Jenny

### **Sunday March 1, 2015**

The last few days have been particularly hard on Aaron. It was Isabella's birthday and we had no money to be able to do anything for her. I broke our rule, of only asking God for what we need, and asked my mom if she could Paypal me some money to be able to do something for Bella. She did, because she's a wonderful momma. The problem was that we didn't have a Paypal card yet, so the money had to be transferred to our bank and the transfer to the bank takes 5-7 business days, which I did not know. So, even in breaking our rule, we didn't have any way to do something fun for our baby. Isabella had received some birthday money in the mail and said she wanted to use that so we could go do something fun, which was super sweet, but also broke our hearts. Our poor baby was using her own birthday money so her parents could take her to do something for her birthday. If God was thinking we needed to be more broken and brought even lower he picked a good method.

Aaron finally heard back from the company he had sent his resume to last month. They want to meet with him on Monday. Aaron said he's not going to go because it doesn't feel right.

We're not angry with God over our lack of direction right now, but I wouldn't say we're overly faith filled either. We know God is willing and able to supply everything we need, but we stand here waiting and nothing happens. It feels like we've been standing in a long line; we have no idea where the line is going or how long we'll be standing in it, but we know it's where we're supposed to be. So, here we stand.

### **Tuesday March 3, 2015**

Still waiting on God to provide the finances for our bills and necessities. We had planned on paying Isabella back as soon as the money from mom was deposited from Paypal into our bank, but we had to use it to put gas in the van and get groceries. Sigh. All of this brings up the question again, Were we really supposed to drop everything and completely trust God? Are we not doing it right? If not what does "doing it right" look like? What do we need to do differently? Even if we do go out to get jobs we're still in the same boat for awhile because we'll have to save enough to be able to rent again. There's no quick fix. At this point it's hard to hold onto his promises because nothing is happening. We are late again with our bills, we only have food because we go to the food pantry at church and we have no idea what we are supposed to be doing here. We did put a donate button on the blog because people had expressed a desire to help us financially and that is the easiest way.

### **Wednesday March 4, 2015**

Isabella had a horrible fever last night. She never completely got over the sore throat she had in February, and her nose had really started running. She woke up in the middle of the night hallucinating about cows over the door, was talking incoherently and was hot everywhere on her body. She was still

like that in the morning, so we took her to Mercy Clinic which helps people with little or no income get medical attention. Aaron had to hold her because she was shaking so bad she couldn't stand. It was our first visit so I had a bunch of paper work I had to fill out. Then they told me it would be \$20 for the visit. I had no idea we had to pay up front. My heart dropped to my feet. I told them I didn't know we'd have to pay anything that day and that I didn't have any money. They said, "None? No credit card or anything?" Nope, none. Then I started crying. I couldn't help it. I was so overwhelmed with her being sick, from lack of sleep and from life in general. I tried to hold it in, but that makes it even worse because then your face contorts and you get the hiccups. The lady I had been talking to told me to have a seat again and she'd get her supervisor. I grabbed a pile of tissues and sat down next to Aaron and tried to stop blubbering. Poor Bella was so, so sick, she didn't need to see her momma falling apart. The supervisor came out to the waiting room looked at Bella and said to me, "You stop crying, honey. We're going to make sure your baby sees a doctor. It's going to be OK." I wanted to kiss her feet. A few minutes later we were in a room getting her vitals checked. She had a double ear infection and pneumonia. She was going to have to be on 2 different medications. There's a pharmacy here that gives free antibiotics with a prescription, so we knew we'd be able to get the medication for her ear infection, but we didn't know how much the medication for the pneumonia would be. I went to pick up both medications and was told the one was free and the other was \$50. Once upon a time it would have been annoying to have to pay that much, but now it was like this huge chasm that I had no way to cross. I was so exhausted and soul weary and didn't have the patience, or really even the faith, to pray and ask God for help. I called my momma again. And, again, we still have no card for our Paypal account so we have to wait for the money to transfer to our bank before we can get the medicine. At least the antibiotics for the ear infection can be started right away and she can start getting relief from that.

On top of all of that going on, Alex is in the production of Grease at his high school so we've been spending a lot of time there helping build the set and making costumes. After the trip to the hospital, picking Jack and Max up from school, and bringing them all back to our friend's house, I headed over to the high school to help with last minute costume alterations and emergencies. The play was supposed to have been last weekend, but the ice storm had closed all school campuses down so it was rescheduled for this weekend. I came in the theater sat down and tried to compose myself before heading into the production madness. I was still not quite myself after the big "tadoo" with Isabella. A few minutes after I sat down a lady turned around, looked at me and said, "I found your blog today and read it. I didn't think I could love your family more than I already do. But, I do. You guys are amazing." The whole composure plan flew out the window. I have vague recollections of people mopping me off the floor after that. OK, it might not have been that dramatic. It might have only been me tearing up and saying thank you, but that's only because I didn't have any strength left in me to produce actual tears. That simple statement was a balm to my heart. In the middle of our crazy madness someone had found our blog, read it, found encouragement in it and was inspired by the faith she read about. Faith that we didn't even think we had. She rescued my sanity that night and re-ignited my little flame of faith that I still possessed but couldn't see.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 9 (March 2015)

By: Jenny

**Monday March 9, 2015**

We had a great weekend with my in-laws. They came to see Alex perform in Grease. Unfortunately, we had another ice storm that turned their 5hr trip into a 2 day journey. Paducah, KY is the half way point in their trip and it had snowed 2 feet there. They were going to try to push through it anyway, but when it took them 35 minutes to go 1 mile they decided they'd best just hunker down for the night. They endured a few more hours of road madness the next morning, but eventually arrived safely.

We stayed with John and Cindy, at their hotel, while they were in town. On Saturday night Max piped up and said, "I think that when we have money we should just spend it on what we need instead of trying to make it last. God knows what we need and maybe he is waiting for us to show him that we trust him by doing that." I honestly don't know if he had heard us talking about that a couple weeks ago, or if he felt that on his own. I thought we had the conversation while they were at school, but I don't remember. Either way, the post "[Things Aren't as Bad as You Think](#)" came out of his words of wisdom. The missing days, from this post, are covered in that post as well.

A lady, that I haven't seen or spoken with since I was a child, contacted us and told us that she read our blog and was very excited about our faith journey. She sent us numerous messages sharing how she had been in similar circumstances and how God had provided for her and brought her through them. We're thanking God for another encouragement in our faith. It came at just the right moment.

My momma called and said the company she's working for merged with another company earlier than expected and she only has 3 weeks of work left. She said she's going to go visit Rachel for a week and then she is going to come visit us for a week. Yay!!! She hasn't been able to visit yet, so I'm super excited! She'll LOVE Nashville!

The topics of prayer and fasting keep coming up at church, books we read, Facebook statuses, and our devotions. I wonder if God is trying to tell us something... We're going to fast this week and hopefully connect more to God and be able to hear what we're supposed to do. We're still clueless here.

I told Aaron that I do not want to go back to our friend's house after spring break. It doesn't feel right to be there and truthfully we're an inconvenience to them. Why do we keep staying on when we know it's not right? I sent a text to my friend telling her of our plan and she was ok with it this time. Haha! She told me we were welcome to stay there and house sit for them while they go on vacation, which happens to be the week after spring break. So, we kind of know what life is going to look like for the next 3 weeks. That's a rarity around here.

In spite of what seems like advances in faith and trusting God, I'm still incredibly weary of all of it. Just last night I told Aaron that I can't take any more of this. I know it's not right that we're at our friend's house, but we also don't have any other alternative, other than living in the van and that can't be a long term thing. I said that when we get back from spring break we're going to get jobs. I'm done

with not having anywhere to live and with provision only eeking in. I decided I would work daytime hours, because I think Aaron needs to be available to people, and he can work overnights. He agreed and looked up jobs at Kroger. They are currently hiring for the overnight shift. I told him that I wanted to wait until after our week of fasting and spring break to apply for jobs. If we haven't gotten any words from God, or seen any action on God's part by the time we get back from break, we're getting out of this situation ourselves because I can't take it anymore.

I know I've said that at least 100 times, "I can't take it anymore." and every time I've said it God has come through with provision, words of wisdom, or encouragement. I'm open to any one of them, but I need to hear from him. I know he'll do something, I don't know what, but I know he will. I'm trying to keep myself from thinking too far ahead. What will happen when we're back from spring break? Where are we going to live? Is God going to keep providing or are we getting jobs? This time of waiting is really tough.

### **Thursday March 12, 2015**

Aaron and I were discussing what God could be doing in our lives, what we should be doing and whether or not we are even hearing God on this adventure, when Aaron remembered that his dad had given us the book "One Hundred Days in the Secret Place" to read. It is a devotional compiled of works written by three different authors, dating back to the 1600's; Jeanne Guyon, Michael Molinos and Francios Fenelon. The book was amazing! It spoke directly to the thoughts that we had and even some of the circumstances in our life. All three authors talked about the importance of letting God "hurt" you, because the suffering prepares you to fulfill your purpose. People do not want to see that God allows suffering and pain, but without it we are not able to grow and mature. As we read, we realized a lot of our actions and reactions have been a result of "self-love" as these authors called it. Instead of being still and allowing God to speak to us, through these difficult circumstances, we have been trying to find ways to have it make sense to ourselves and show others that we are still working for God. What if our work right now is to be still? What if it is not time for outward work, but time for inward work? Are we ok with that? Are we ok with resting in him, being still, listening to his voice and letting him do "heart" work when outwardly it looks like we're being stupid, lazy and not following him at all? We need to remember "the Lord sees not as man sees...the Lord looks on the heart."

### **Monday March 23, 2015**

We spent spring break in Illinois with my in-laws. We had wonderful conversations about what God is doing and the many things we're learning and unlearning. It is difficult to stay in the fire of our situation, when there are so many places where we could go to be safely done with it. We know that if we jump out before God is done refining us, we will not be the vessel needed for the work he is calling us to. While it is hard for us to go through, something I noticed this week is that it is really hard for our parents to watch us going through it. Parental instinct is to rescue your child from what is hurting them. Kind of hard to do when the one allowing the fire is God. We talked about having to unlearn the need to earn our privilege to talk to God, or have a relationship with him. We have realized that so much of

what we do is because we think if we don't do it a certain way God will ignore us or punish us. Faith is such a fine line. Yes, God has expectations of us, but at the same time if we fail that doesn't mean our relationship is over, or that we have to earn the right to talk with him again. We have heard that we can't earn our salvation our entire lives, but somehow we fell into that trap anyway. Instead of "working out our salvation with fear and trembling" we've turned to doing what we've been told God expects, and when we fail we busily try to do more to make up for where we failed, in hope that God will listen to us. His mercy is far greater than we can ever understand. He is the epitome of the patient Father that wants the best for his children and is helping them learn how to get there. He isn't waiting for us to fail, so he can walk away and leave us. He's there for us, so when we fail we have loving arms to fall into and a loving father to show us the right way. Why do we keep taking the painful route of penance?

During my bible reading this week I came across 2 Corinthians 5:11-15. I love it! It is our heart's desire written right there in the bible:

"Because we understand our fearful responsibility to the Lord, we work hard to persuade others. God knows we are sincere, and I hope you know this, too.

Are we commending ourselves to you again? No, we are giving you a reason to be proud of us, so you can answer those who brag about having a spectacular ministry rather than having a sincere heart. If it seems we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit.

Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life.

He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

## **Sanders Family Unabridged Part 10 (April 2015)**

By: Jenny

### **Tuesday April 7, 2015**

My mommy came to visit!! This was her first visit and we had a blast!! I got to be Tour Guide Barbie for the week and showed her all the places that are part of our everyday life, Civil War sites, downtown Nashville and, of course, multiple restaurants. You can't come south and not eat every 20 minutes. There are too many yummy places your tummy needs to discover. She took me to my first Grand Ole Opry show and we absolutely loved it! I had a near fan girl melt down during the show. Little known fact about me; I love Steven Tyler. I have no idea why. Maybe because he's so quirky and unique? I don't know, but all of a sudden there he was on stage. What?!! I guess one of the sayings at the Opry is "you never know who you'll see" (or something like that) and he wasn't on the schedule, it was a surprise visit. I couldn't function normally for about 30 seconds. I was trying desperately to get my camera to work, but my hands were fluttering about like they were having spasms. I was bouncing in my seat, my mouth was hanging open and my eyes were probably the size of Frisbees. My mother was laughing hysterically because this is not a normal reaction for me. My normal self would be, "Oh, there's the President. Oh, there's Barbra Streisand. Oh, there's Chris Hemsworth." It definitely made the Opry a memorable experience. I may or may not have camped out there for the next few weeks. Oh, and I never did get a good picture. My momma had to get it for me. Her hands weren't spastic. The kiddos were in school the whole week she was visiting, so they only got to spend time with her in the evenings. We did our best to bore them with museums and walking tours, on the weekend, but they loved it. They especially loved the Dukes of Hazard museum aka "Cooters". Bonus points for us for raising little geekers! We got a hotel room a couple of doors down from her for those two days so we didn't waste any of our fun time. The kiddos were thrilled because they got to be in beds. They've either been in the van or on pallets at our friends' house for the past few months so beds are very exciting. It's in moments like this that you realize you really do need to be thankful for the little things. Our van battery had been giving us trouble, but we did not have the extra funds to get a new one. We got an email from our Paypal account stating that someone had sent us \$100 (yay!!), so we went right to the store to get a battery. Mom was still in town and said she wanted to buy it for us. (Double yay!!) It worked out wonderfully because on Monday when Aaron brought the kiddos to school he noticed we had a flat tire. Our angel bus driver friend had noticed as well and drove over to the local tire shop right as Aaron was getting there. He knew all the guys working there and introduced Aaron to all of them and stuck around to make sure they gave him a good deal. It ended up being \$85. Thank you to everyone that has listened to God on our behalf!! You never know when what you have to give to people is exactly what they need. Whether it be money, time or words of encouragement.

### **Thursday April 9, 2015**

We received a message from someone sending encouragement and assurance that we were in their prayers. They also asked what our needs were at that moment. They were planning to send us money,

and wanted to know what bills were needing to be paid so they could send the right amount. We gave them our list of bills and how much they were. They sent us more than the amount for the bills, so we had some left over for gas in the van, groceries and even to send Jack to his 8th grade formal. As we read “100 Days in the Secret Place” we feel God teaching and leading us to lay everything down, even the desire for the supernatural, and seek him above all of it. We need to so completely die to ourselves that we do anything and everything for Him, only, without hopes of what it might produce. So often we seek him with the intent of hearing from him for the answer to a challenging problem, we need a miracle, we need the right words to speak to someone, or because we want to see more of the supernatural. All of those are certainly part of a walk with God, but what has happened to seeking him simply because he’s worthy of all of our devotion even without all of those other things? Do we really understand how awesome he is, how powerful and terrifying he is and yet he has this amazing, incomprehensible love for us? If we really realized it, we wouldn’t have a problem leaving everything behind and serving him just because of who he is. That love alone is worth everything in this world and the universe and whatever else we could grab to throw in the pile. If we found another human being that loved us that intensely, we wouldn’t have a problem leaving everything so that we could live in that love. Somehow that level of devotion escapes us because the intense, life changing, unfailing, healing, never ending love that we long for comes from an invisible God.

## **Sanders Family FAQ**

January 2016 By Jenny

We readily admit our journey is a frustrating one to live, let alone understand. A large part of my hesitation in sharing all the details of our journey is the apparent idiocy of it all. It was very hard for me to lay down my fears, and pride to reveal all of it to anyone who follows, or happens to find our blog. It's one thing to live a crazy life in the middle of the love and support of those around you, but it's a completely different animal to be laid bare for ALL to see; as is witnessed by my very sporadic postings of the Unabridged Series.

All of that to say, I've decided we need a FAQ post. Maybe I'll even get really teach-y (by me, I really mean Aaron) and have an FAQ section on our page. We LOVE it when people ask us questions about our journey. For reals, we do! It shows you care about us and that makes us happy. Yes, the questions are hard and uncomfortable, but we love answering them and talking with anyone who is interested. So please ask away!

### **Why don't you have a job?**

Aaron didn't have a job for 2 1/2 years because we felt like God was asking us to go deeper into "seek first the kingdom" and to wholly and completely trust him and him alone. We knew this wasn't going to be a forever thing, but that it was a part of the journey that needed to happen.

### **Do you think everyone has to live by faith?**

Yes, everyone should live by faith. But, not everyone will have to sell all they have, move 1,000 miles away, not have a job and wait for God's direction. That's our story. Each of our children will have a different story and all of you will have a different story. There may be similarities, (you'd be shocked at how many people have been told at some point in their walk with God not to work. I know I was.) but no story will be identical. God knows what needs to happen in your spiritual makeup that will help you to grow and that's what he's going to ask you to do.

### **Do you use government assistance?**

No, we do not use government assistance. There are two reasons: 1. We felt like God said to trust him alone and we wouldn't be trusting him alone if we were relying on government assistance. 2. This is a faith walk and not an involuntary financial crisis. Government assistance needs to be used by those that are involuntarily in a place where they need help. That's why that system was put into place. If you need it, use it. If you're on a faith walk, what you have or need comes from him and his people.

### **Why do you have a donate button?**

We put the donate button on the blog because people asked us to. They wanted a way to send us financial help that would be fast and secure. This does not violate our trusting God alone. The people that have given have prayed and felt like that's what God wanted them to do. God likes to help his people through his people, it builds the church.

### **How are you ok with other people taking care of your family?**

We're not. This is one of the hardest parts of our journey particularly for Aaron. We don't understand it and we don't like it. We appreciate all the love and support, but we don't like having to be in this spot. For some reason God does this though. Elijah and the widow 1 Kings 17:7-16, Elisha and the Shunamite woman 2 Kings 4:8-10, the 12 disciples Luke 9:1-5, the 72 disciples Luke 10:1-8. Those are the first that come to mind, I'm sure there are more.

These are the 5 most asked questions and all of them lead on a rabbit trail of other questions. Haha! Please contact us anytime you have a question about what we're doing. We are on a journey of faith and the reason we blog is so that, hopefully, through sharing we can bring encouragement and hope to people. We also wholeheartedly believe that all of what we are going through is preparing us for a specific purpose that we were not ready for previously. Please continue to pray for us, we will be praying for you all as well. God has greater things for all of us than we have ever imagined.

## **Sanders Family Unabridged Part 11 (April 2015 Continued)**

By: Jenny

### **Friday April 10, 2015**

Obedience certainly comes with surprises! It has been less than a month since we decided to listen to the God nudges and step out into the craziest thing we've ever done (living in a van) and an amazing peace has met us there. While our bodies are certainly not the most comfortable they've ever been, our spirits are feeling a peace that has been absent the past several months. I feel like if it were visible we would see a big cushy, hug-able something surrounding us. I have no idea what it would be, I just know I'd want to hug it! Haha!

### **Monday April 13, 2015**

Down to \$5.00 in our pockets again. I wonder if God is gauging our reactions when we get there; do we still trust him or are we going to freak out?

We were able to get a decent amount of "van friendly" food from the church's food pantry. Having no running water, stove or microwave really narrows down one's options. Ha! The bulk of food for the week is canned ham and PBJ's. Not the healthiest, but it keeps the babies' bellies full.

Two portions of scripture have really given peace and hope today.

"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

Isaiah 43:18-19

"I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them." Isaiah 42:8-9

### **Wednesday April 15, 2015**

We had an interesting life conversation with the kiddos. They were asking us why we get stressed out so often. Oh, sweet clueless children! We admitted to them that there are a lot of things in our life that shouldn't stress us out if we really believe that God is in control, but they still do, sometimes. We were also honest with them and told them that being in such close quarters with fighting, disobedient children would stress anybody out. Hehe! They made a deal with us and said that they would do better about not fighting and disobeying if we would do better with not stressing about how things are going to work out. Jack said, "Let's live like we won't see tomorrow!" We've seen God's amazing goodness and provision over and over again so we know he is faithful. Now I want to know how long these kiddos are going to stick to being nice and obedient!!

### **Saturday April 18, 2015**

Whenever, or if ever, we get to start our life center I'm going to be tempted to name it "Breaking Point" because that seems to be the place we continually get to. We just want to fix this whole "mess"! We are

not dumb, we are not lazy. God, just let us be like normal people and go get “real” jobs!!! UGH!!!! As of Thursday we were down to 1/4 tank of gas in the van and all we had for food was some canned ham, mac n’ cheese (that we had no way to cook) and ramen noodles (again, that we had no way to cook). I had written a \$20 check for a school function that hadn’t cashed yet so I called the teacher I gave it to and asked if she still had it if she could hold on to it for a little while longer. She still had it and was willing to wait to deposit it. We used that \$20 to put gas in the van and ate canned ham and dry ramen noodles for supper. We ended up babysitting for a friend on Friday afternoon, so we were able to make the mac n’ cheese and put it into storage bowls so the kiddos could eat it after school. Now all our food was gone and we were not sure what we would be eating today. I stopped by Starbucks Friday night just before they closed, to see if my friend was working. She was and they had leftover pastries that had to be thrown out, so she gave them to me instead. The kiddos got to have pastries for breakfast. We are really trying to listen to the Lord with an open heart, to wholeheartedly trust him and to live “give us this day” in complete faith. “Give us this day” is so much easier when you can see where and how you are going to get everything.

### **Monday April 20, 2015**

We are feeling a little bit better today. On the way to our friends’ house to do laundry on Saturday afternoon we told the kiddos we were out of food and money and asked who wanted to pray that we would receive those things. Alex said he would and he told God what we needed and then thanked him for whatever he was going to send. I checked my emails while we were waiting in between our loads of laundry and someone had sent money to our Paypal account. It wasn’t a lot, it was just enough to get food for the day (Sunday we are able to stock up from the food pantry) and put gas in the van. The kiddos were so excited!! We were too, but their faith levels were through the roof. We ended up being at our friends’ house much longer than we had planned; children create a lot of laundry! Our friend came down to the room we were in and offered to cook a big pack of chicken they had, if we wanted to make something to go with it for supper. They are in a very similar situation to ours (except they are in a house. ha!) so I wanted to make something that would last for more than one meal, and they could have leftovers. Tacos to the rescue!! Seriously, you can never go wrong with tacos. They are a love language all in themselves. Our friends had also offered to let us crash at their place for the night. When Aaron took Alex to the store to get the other things we needed for the tacos, Alex told him he didn’t think we should stay the night there. He said his body would love the chance to stretch out, but it didn’t feel right in his spirit. Aaron and I hadn’t felt like we should either, but we hadn’t said anything to the kids. Maybe we were hoping to push it away, because we wanted the kiddos to be more comfortable. When they got back from the store Aaron told me about their conversation so, without telling anything about anyone else’s thoughts, we had the kiddos pray about it. They all said they were thankful for the offer, but that we should be in our van. They pray these things and listen honestly with their spirits. It amazes me!!! They admit that their bodies would love to be in a house, but that it doesn’t feel comfortable in their spirits. So many things about our journey are crazy, but I am thankful

that our children are learning to listen to the Lord at such a young age and that they are willing to obey him even when it isn't comfortable and doesn't make sense.

## **Sanders Family Unabridged Part 12 (April 2015 Continued)**

By: Jenny

### **Wednesday April 22, 2015**

We have enough food for the rest of the week and about 1/2 of a tank of gas. God so graciously reminded us, again, last week that he knows right where we are and what we need and he is faithful to provide. Hopefully, that means we won't get worked up again this weekend! Honestly, we will probably do better this week regardless because it's Aaron's birthday and he will be getting birthday money in the mail. So pathetic, but true! Haha!

We decided that when school gets out for the year, we will take the kiddos up to Aaron's parents for their yearly Granny and Pop vacation and we will come back here and clean out the 2 storage units. We'll take pictures of everything and post it on Craigslist and just clean everything out. This is a huge step for me because I have been hanging onto all my stuff so tightly. Even though I can't do anything with it, I haven't wanted to let it go. Now I feel good about it. There's no sense in spending money on storing things that we can't use and have no idea when we will be able to use them again. As with everything, we have made this plan and are just leaving it in the Lord's hands. He can change it if it needs to be changed.

### **Monday April 27, 2015**

We had a wonderful weekend for Aaron's birthday!! Our friends had asked us if we could take our washer and dryer out of their garage, because they were going to be putting their house on the market and needed to clean everything out. Well, this was much different than when we were trying to sell the things to save our hineys. We put them on a local Facebook garage sale site and the crazy things sold in about 20 minutes. The lady came and got them Saturday morning, so we were able to go out for Aaron's birthday. We went to the KFC buffet; buffets are always our friend because of our hungry teenagers, who happen to have no taste buds only sensors for when they are hungry or full. We also went to a local theater that plays movies at a discount, because they have already been released on DVD. All six of us can see a movie and get popcorn and soda for \$25. Three cheers for fun, low budget outings!!! Between the money from the washer and dryer and Aaron's birthday money, we will have more than enough to make it through the week with no melt downs.

### **Thursday April 30, 2015**

Ok, I lied about making it through the week with no melt downs. I completely melted into a puddle on the floor of the van. We have glimpses of what God wants us to do and visions of how we will serve God and people, but all of it seems totally impossible. I don't know if I have the strength to make it through this training process and make it to the vision. I am so overwhelmed with the thought of this indefinite stay in the van, of having to go to our storage unit to pick out clothes, go to the rec center to exercise, swim, shower and then settle in for the night, in the van. Sleeping in the clothes that we'll be wearing the next day, and hopefully no one needs to use the bathroom in the middle of the night

because that means either a long walk across a parking lot or waking Aaron up to drive to the front of whatever store we happen to be parked by. In addition to that, the storage unit is only accessible from 7-9 so if we've forgotten anything we're stuck waiting to do something about it until it opens again. I didn't try to come up with any solutions to "get us out of this", I'm just really tired of this "training". I decided that I am not going to wallow in my frustrations, so I went online and created a Sanders Family Facebook page and YouTube channel. Haha! Yes, I admit I have really strange therapy solutions. I want people to be able to see the crazy, fun, real life family side of us in addition to this crazy, nonsensical, following God side.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 13 (May 2015)

By: Jenny

### Thursday May 7, 2015

We had tons of fun and were super busy last weekend! On Friday Alex was in a One Act play at school. It was about a group of people that went spelunking and got trapped. Each character was the embodiment of a different emotion and he was the embodiment of anger. He did such a good job!! There was even thunderous applause after one of his monologues. Proud papa and mama moment! Aaron had come back that afternoon with an envelope from our bus driver friend addressed to all of us and he said we had to open it up when we were all together. We were all too tired after the One Acts performances, so we decided to open it on Saturday.

We had to wake up early Saturday morning because Izzy was going to be participating in a color run with her school. She was so excited and had such a fun time! She was cracking us up because she is completely my child when it comes to the athletic side of life. We were waiting for her near the finish line when we see her come around the corner. She was not running or even really walking, she was trudging. Hahaha!! When she saw us though she lit up and started running and that was even funnier. Her legs are sooo long and she brings her knees up really high when she runs. She reminded us of something on Loony Toons, like her legs had turned into wheels or something. We probably horrified half the parents standing around us because we were laughing so hard about it. Afterward we told Izzy what she looked like while she was running and she thought it was funny too. At least the sick humor is a family thing and we understand each other.

We went to the rec. center after the race to swim and shower and then we read the letter from our friend. In short the letter said that he was "buying a ticket" for the Sanders family to have a fun weekend and bless everyone around them with their smiles. He gave us a bunch of coupons to different places and \$25. He wanted us to go out and eat or go get ice cream. The kiddos' new favorite place to get chicken is Publix. I went in and got two 8 piece containers of fried chicken and a side of potato wedges. We had a little money left over so we went to Aldi and got a 1/2 gallon of ice cream and some cones. We texted pictures of our fun to our friend.

Sunday morning there was a guest speaker at church. When the speaker was finished and everyone was praying the pastor got up to read a portion of scripture that was on his heart. "The Lord says, 'I will give you back what you lost to the swarming locusts, the hopping locusts, the stripping locusts, and the cutting locusts. It was I who sent this great destroying army against you. Once again you will have all the food you want, and you will praise the Lord your God, who does these miracles for you. Never again will my people be disgraced.'" That hit us right in the heart and let us know that God was still aware of where we are. Those verses were some of the first verses we felt like God gave us when the "suffering" part of our journey began. The pastor then prayed a blessing over anyone who was

currently experiencing that season. Our circumstances didn't change, but we were thankful for the reminder that God still sees us and this isn't the end.

### **Wednesday May 13, 2015**

The kiddos decided to play Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde on Mother's Day weekend. And it was Mr. Hyde that I got to spend Mother's Day with. Wow.

Saturday was great we exercised and swam at the rec. center, had a pizza picnic at the park and then went to the mall. Then Mr. Hyde appeared on Sunday morning. The children, overtaken by some devil spirit, argued over everything. Literally ev-ery-thing. If you don't know about mommas, that makes a momma super crabby. Poor Aaron was stuck between devil children and a snarly faced momma. Part of the problem was that I'm sick and tired of not being able to just take the kids somewhere to eat good food. I wanted to bring them to Jason's Deli for the salad bar so they could eat all the good food they want to their hearts content. And yes, our children actually do like salad, so it wouldn't have been a punishment. I decided to stop feeling sorry for myself and we went to Aldi, where I bought sandwich fixings and fruits and vegetables. Still good food, but not what I wanted. Get over it Jen. Ok, I did. We have all been on a kick for healthy food. It's wonderful to be able to get food from a food pantry, but often what is there is boxed, processed stuff. That has started me thinking about how we can get good healthy food to low income people. Your body just doesn't feel good eating all that processed junk all the time. Izzy has been earnestly praying for green bean casserole. We go to the rec. center almost every night to swim and every night she will either stay by me (if there are a lot of people in the pool) or she will go to a corner of the pool and thank God for all she has and then ask if she could please have some green bean casserole. Oh. My. Goodness. What a doll!! Insert all the heart emojis!

We have been talking with the boys about the significance of our life right now, and how on a human level we understand that people have to be put in extreme circumstances to make sure they can stand the pressure of the situations they will be placed in in the future. Think Navy Seals or Army Rangers. We know that what we are going through right now is preparing us for the places God is bringing us in the future. The boys said that it gets hard sometimes because God promised us we would have more than enough. After thinking about it for awhile Jack piped up and said, "But, if someone came up to us and said, 'I'm going to give you \$5 a day to live on. Someday I will give you \$1,000,000, but for right now you get \$5 a day.' we would keep on living on that \$5 and wait for the \$1,000,000." I am so thankful for the time we have to have conversations with them and watch how they grow and how they are able to see that God does things for our good, but that sometimes we need to patiently wait to see the good.

## From Wiffle Ball To the Big Leagues

February 2016 By Aaron

Jenny recently reminded me of a realization that we had early in the summer of 2015. We realized that God had invited us to play a game that we were not yet equipped to play. We also, foolishly, thought that God had invited us to do a “new thing”, but we were shocked and delighted to find that he had called many, many people to participate in the game, long before us. We were not only ill equipped to play, we were late to the game!

Here is an illustration: Our spiritual life, prior to this adventure, was like playing wiffle ball in your backyard. It is like baseball, but it is not really baseball. We were pretty good at wiffle ball though (See [“Confessions of a Recovering Super Christian”](#)). We knew just how to swing the plastic bat and make contact with the plastic ball and hit it over the backyard fence. We had grown very comfortable with our wiffle ball skills and were set to become experts. Then God began to call us to play a new game.

The call made my head spin at first. God started by talking to me all of the time. Not audibly, but somehow I just knew things. I would not have believed it was God, if it were not for the confirmations that would follow. For example, one day I was sitting in my office, in St. Paul, MN and I just knew that I needed to get up and take a walk in the skyway, because someone needed to talk. I went for a walk and came across a man who was struggling with his faith. It turns out he was raised in a pastor’s home and was contemplating a return to faith. That meeting, resulted in many lunch dates and Bible discussions as the man slowly returned to a relationship with God.

These type of things happened all of the time. I remember preaching messages, at my former church, about God speaking all of the time. I was very excited about this newly discovered talking God. He did that type of thing in the Bible, but this was happening in my lifetime and to me!! He talked about people, what they were doing, things they were hiding, and things that had been done to them. I would get frustrated at this, because I knew things that I was powerless to fix. This led to my prayer life being focused on knowing the God of the Bible and a desire to tap into the power that could call things that were not as though they are.

This went on for awhile, then one Sunday night, as I was sitting in church, he said, “I will no longer talk to you about these people”. I remember being horrified and confused. I did not talk to anyone about it, I just prayed. At the same time, Jenny was becoming unsettled and we began to explore what God was telling our family to do next. We have already written extensively about the events that led to our move to Tennessee, so I will not go into that here. I just wanted to capture what God’s invitation looked like for me.

Back to the game! God had invited us to leave the wiffle ball game and join a community baseball team. These guys played with a heavy bat and a solid ball. They also played on huge fields and commanded power that we had only read and studied about. These people heard God tell them things like, “write for me and I will provide”. They were crazy enough to obey and one of the largest book publishers in the country contacted them and asked them to write a book! Others asked God for a nation and now the United Nations contacts this person whenever they need to know where to send humanitarian aid in Mozambique- their nation!

That type of stuff does not happen in wiffle ball games and we came to realize how unprepared we were to play at that level. Thankfully, God has been graciously training us for the game (See [God's Training Plan](#)) and we have been surrounded by those who are more familiar with baseball and they are cheering us on and believe in us. We are called to great things and we will stick with this big league game, because we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength!

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 14 (June 2015)

By: Jenny

### Wednesday June 17, 2015

School dismissed for the year on 5/21 and we headed straight for Aaron's parents, in Illinois. Our original plan had been to bring the kiddos there, stay for a week or two, come back to TN (sans children), and then go get them again in three weeks or so. That has been the summer routine since Alex was four or five. A few days before our planned departure, Aaron's brother called to say he and his family were going to come visit the following Monday. Such a fun surprise and of course we had to stay so we could see them!

Aaron has been working with his dad, pouring and finishing concrete, and the kids have been enjoying the outdoors, helping Pop with chores in the garden or cleaning the chicken coop and even a little bit of frog gigging. Their most favorite thing is their love language...food! If you want to get a Sanders kid to love you, buy them food! Granny always gets them all their favorite snacks and treats and makes their favorite suppers during their stay and they always come home at least 10lbs heavier. Haha!!!

I have not written at all since we left Tennessee. I feel directionless (is that a word?). It has been wonderful being with Aaron's parents because the kiddos all have beds, bathrooms and we are in nice air conditioned comfort, but we miss Tennessee. We have all agreed that next summer we are not going to be away for so long. I have had a weird feeling of being on the verge of a panic or anxiety attack. I find myself having to take frequent deep breaths. I try to continually remind myself of the good God has shown us, and the good he has done in us. If I do not do that, my worry spirals totally out of control and I start thinking like Aaron. Hehe! I skip way ahead into the coming school year and start worrying about how all of that is going to work out. I also have a struggle in myself to read the Bible which is very weird because it has been my lifeline, literally, for the last two years. Reading it has brought so much encouragement and strength, but I do not have the longing to read or pray as earnestly as I did before. It upsets me because I know the way I will receive the encouragement, strength and direction that I need will be by staying connected to God.

One night I felt so weary and broken that I laid in bed crying, asking God for grace and strength because I was so overwhelmed. I picked up my phone to look at my Bible app and see what the verses of the day had been for the last few days, because I had not even bothered to look at those. The verse for that day came up first:

“Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have declared so well before many witnesses.” 1 Timothy 6:12

God always, always, always knows where we are. If we need a rebuke he will give it, but he knows that often all we need is to be reminded of his word, of the things he has called us to and of the strength he gives us. Instead of a rebuke for not reading and seeking like I had been previously, he reminded me to keep fighting. Everything we go through on earth is either for our growth, or so we can help someone else. If God thinks I am strong enough to go through things on someone else's behalf, then I guess I am strong enough.

**Friday June 19, 2015**

Aaron and I came back to Tennessee for a week to renew the tabs on our van, clean up our storage units and help friends with some projects around their house. We talked this morning about the fine line of faith and action. We act because we “should” be doing something to act out our faith (because faith without works is dead), but often we are simply staying busy to distract ourselves and we miss what God is actually trying to do in us. Our main action should be to seek him. When we seek him, he gives us the action that is next. We have discovered that God does not hide things from us, he hides them for us. This brings us right back to our action needing to be seeking him. He promises that when we seek him, we will find him.

Two years ago God told us to go out and play. We have been completely focused on this “play” being an action. When we have tried to “go out and play”, we realize that we were bringing all of our old equipment and that God had totally upped the game! We were showing up in the back yard with a wiffle ball set and He shows up with a narrow wooden bat and a tiny hard ball (see post “From Wiffle Ball to the Big Leagues”). We do not have the strength and skills to play at this level. He has been trying to teach us, but we keep trying make our wiffle ball set work (our own actions). We have to be able to lay down our pride and allow him to teach us how this “new game” works. Even though it looks similar and we want to keep doing things the way we have always done them before, he is calling us to a higher place and we need to trust him as he shows us what we need to do.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 15 (July 2015)

By: Jenny

### July 28, 2015

For most of July we were in Minnesota and Wisconsin visiting my family and I took another break from writing while we were there. We stayed with my sister and her family before we headed to my grandparents, so we ended up going through part of Iowa to get to Minnesota. I've always heard about what a boring drive it is but I thought it was really charming! It is mostly farms, but it also has rolling hills with quaint barns. Very Americana, I loved it!

Once we got to grandpa and grandma's the whole family did their job of spoiling us with shopping trips and stuffing us full of our favorite foods. Can I just take a moment and thank the Lord for Swedish meatloaf and enchiladas? What if we made Swedish meatloaf enchiladas??!! That might be divine inspiration right there! Or, not.

We are now back in Tennessee and we spent our first summer night in the van last night. It was HOT!! Yikes, man!! We had to keep turning the van back on every twenty minutes or so to let the van cool down. We were all sweating like crazy. I am sure the smells permeating from the van were things dreams are made of. Not good dreams, but dreams anyway. We are sitting at the library now, still wearing the clothes we sweltered in last night. My hypersensitivity to being smelly is going bonkers right now. Anytime someone walks by the table I snarl at them so they do not get too close and smell us. Okay, I do not snarl, but I am sitting here totally freaked out. Jack has freshmen orientation at the high school this morning. He is going to be there from 8:00-12:00. Thankfully he had a change of clothes with him, so I do not have to obsessively worry about how he smells while he is with his friends.

We are not sure what we are going to do from here. More waiting on the Lord, I guess. I feel like a little kid whenever I pray. "Are we there yet, are we there yet?" I am getting tired of hearing "You need to wait. Just rest and be still." Ugh!! Someday the answer will be different, right!?

It is so hot right now! The heat index is forecast to be up to 107\*. I love the heat, but I love the heat when I am able to escape to air conditioned rooms that have plenty of cool water. We have the rec center, but we have no desire to be there for eight plus hours a day. So, life right now is moving from place to place hoping to stay cool, trying to find things to do that are free, showering at the rec center at night, putting on and sleeping in the clothes that we will wear the next day, stopping at parks to get water, having to use public bathrooms all the time (so gross!), brushing our teeth and doing our hair in the van, walking around with swollen ankles because we sleep in a sitting position all night. The kiddos have gotten used to making themselves comfortable at the library because that is where we can charge

our phones and computers and stay cool. We eat a lot of sandwiches and if we have extra money we buy fresh fruits and veggies, but we are still mostly eating whatever we can get from the food pantry. Yes, yes, I am totally venting and whining. But, I also want to write this all out to document how most days are for us right now. I do not think we will ever forget it, but rereading what my emotions and thoughts are at this time will be valuable as well. The bright spot to all of this is that in the middle of trying to get from one “safe place” to another we will randomly meet people that we are able to encourage or that encourage us.

This life has really opened our eyes to how many people we could be walking by every day that look like they have it all together, but in reality are hungry, broken and destitute. We are in a slightly different place because we know that God is with us and that he is asking us to walk this path right now. He could make everything we need appear from nothing, but he seems to like using people to bless people. We are missing out when we pass up opportunities to help others. I believe that when we fulfill the needs of others God turns that around and gives fulfillment to us. I pray that I never, never, ever forget that and that I do not wait to be able to give a grandiose gift, but that I will give whether I have much or little. There are times when a genuine smile means just as much, sometimes more, than thousands of dollars. Humans are the ones that determine whether something is a great act of service, or if it is insignificant. What is true is, we do not know what kind of impact our actions have on others. We need to be led by God.

God, let us hear your voice for each interaction, every situation, so that your brilliance will shine through us and give light to someone’s day.

### **Wednesday July 29, 2015**

After my tirade yesterday, Aaron and I were talking about how it might be time for a change. We feel like all we do is go from place to place trying to keep warm, or cool, or trying to stay busy so we are not just sitting in a van. We do not see anything happening and we do not feel like we are accomplishing any kind of mission. It would be different if we knew what our “mission” was and we were working at it and knew that God was working behind the scenes. But, we have no clue as to what our mission even is, let alone what kind of scenes God could be working behind! We are wandering around homeless and uncomfortable, what kind of mission is that?!

We decided that if we are going to fill our days with being busy doing nothing, then we are going to be busy working and getting money so that at least we can have a place we can rest and eat and have our own bathrooms! We could even just buy a camper for awhile if need be. At least it would be ours! And, after that mini tirade, we calmed ourselves down and said that we need to seriously fast and pray to be able to see and hear what God wants to do through us and for us. We know he has plans for us and we do not want to do anything to delay his plans, but neither do we want to wander doing nothing. We are

going to dedicate the next seven days to prayer and fasting. We are going to pray for purpose and a plan and remind God of his promises.

After writing the above decision we went to the library (oh, lovely library) to charge phones and have somewhere comfortable to sit and write. I started my devotions for the day and the author was talking about an illness they had and how fear and worry over that illness had consumed them until they decided to meditate on Psalm 143 and specifically verse 8. For me the whole Psalm was like reading my own mind of late, but especially verse 7; “Come quickly, Lord, and answer me, for my depression deepens. Don’t turn away from me or I will die.”

Aaron went and found a couple of books on prayer by E.M. Bounds. We are seeing, as we read, that we often turn from, or cannot hear the voice of God because we are listening to too many other voices. I believe every one has their own journey with God and everyone is at a different point in their journey. You can listen to the advice from the person on the mountain top, but unless you are also climbing a mountain you might not be able to apply all of it to your life. You might be walking through a valley, so mountain laws and survival skill will not be necessary or applicable to you. I have specifically heard from God many, many times to keep asking, seeking and knocking, but then I will read a book or devotional that says to wait on God because he already knows what you need. I know and believe that and there will probably be a time in my life where that is what I need to do, but right now the voice I need to listen to is the voice of God and he keeps saying, “Ask, seek and knock.” So, that is what I am going to do...while I wait.

#### **Thursday July 30, 2015**

“Prayer is asking, seeking and knocking at a door for something we have not, which we desire, and which God has promised to us.” ~ E.M. Bounds

Funny that I would decide yesterday to concentrate only on the voice of God and what he is saying about asking, seeking and knocking and then I would read the above quote, from E.M. Bounds, this morning. After reading it we began talking about the promises God has given us. Not only the ones in his word, i.e. the Holy Spirit, healing, miracles, peace, etc., but the ones that he gave specifically to the Sanders family. Before we even moved here (we were still in the process of it all) God told us we were going to have more than enough and that we would be a blessing to people. Since we have been here he has promised he would give us a house. The promise of “seek first the kingdom” has been true and active in our life. We always have food, clothes and a place to sleep. It may not be a lot of food, but we are never hungry and it may be our van, but it is somewhere safe. We see that promise every day, but we are waiting for the other ones to happen. I want to hold on to this insight that I have been given; that I so easily stray from the voice of God and from his promises when things do not look the way I think they should. For now he told me to ask, seek and knock and he told me to write. Those are the things I need to be doing until he gives me the next step.

## **Sanders Family Unabridged Part 16 (August 2015)**

By: Jenny

### **Saturday August 1, 2015**

We are still fasting and praying and God is still reminding us of things he has already said. Haha! I told Aaron my thoughts about going back to what God originally said and how I have refocused after being reminded of it again and again. He thought for awhile and said one of the first things God told him since being here was to wake up sleeping giants. A sleeping giant is a Christian that has fallen into the routine of religion and is not living the passion and purpose for which God has created them.

We are still being reminded over and over about the necessity of prayer and the power it has. We can know it is true, but we do not understand how to get to that place of power. We are going to continue praying, the way we know how, and ask God to show us where we need to go from there.

### **Sunday August 2, 2015**

We went to Grace Center this morning for the first time (minus the one Sunday Aaron and I were back), since school got out at the beginning of summer. I have to use the good ol' church cliché and say that the message was totally for us, because it was. Pastor Jeff had a message prepared and felt like he was not supposed to give it, so he had a man come up to share about a healing he had received while Pastor Jeff waited to see what direction God was wanting to go. He ended up talking about recognizing the seasons in your life. If it looks like nothing is happening in your life, if it feels like you are not doing anything, do not despair. You very well could be in a season of perseverance and in this time your roots are growing deep so that you will be strong enough to go through all the things God has planned for you. He then talked about hope deferred makes the heart sick and we can hold on to disappointment and make ourselves lose focus on Jesus Christ, our source of hope. He quoted Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." he kept repeating that we have a future and a hope, a future and a hope, a future and a hope, etc. He also used a verse in Joel that had encouraged me in one of my moments of great discouragement. Joel 2:19 The Lord will reply, "Look! I am sending you grain and new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy your needs. You will no longer be an object of mockery among the surrounding nations." At the end of the message Pastor asked those who would like prayer for keeping hope alive to come forward. Isabella was in Sunday school so it was Aaron and I and the boys that went forward. A man came up to us that we have never met and started praying for us. He told Aaron the word he kept hearing for our family was "restoration". He also said he kept seeing a scene from the old west when they would all begin to circle their wagons. He said that we are circling our wagons and that help is coming.

I am not sure I am satisfied with those answers. Aaron broke his fast after church saying that God undeniably spoke to us, that He knows where we are, and that we should continue to persevere. He

reminded me of our conversation months ago about clay pots and if they are taken out of the fire too early they will not be strong enough for what they were made to do. all that is true, but I am still not sure I am satisfied. Hannah did not even have a promise from God, but she petitioned him for what she wanted most. Jacob did not have a specific promise of protection from Esau, but that was one of the reasons he was up all night wrestling with an angel.

We began a 40 day prayer devotional with the kiddos. We talked about the importance of asking, seeking, and knocking and never giving up. We talked about God giving us promises and that he would not give promises that he did not intend to keep. Aaron said that we would keep on knocking and pounding on heavens doors until our hands fall off. Max chimed in and said, “And then we’ll pound on the door with our heads!”

### **Wednesday August 5, 2015**

We have had a few horrible nights of sleeping in the van. We made our own air conditioner out of a Styrofoam cooler filled with ice and a fan so that we would not have to keep starting the van to cool down. Good thought, but it is so humid that it does not keep up so we have to start the van anyway. We woke up disgustingly sweaty and smelly. Aaron said he was thankful for the words that we received and the reminder of our direction, but after a horribly hot night Sunday night he woke up Monday morning and said, “This is not ok. I am going to fast again. We need a house.” Haha!

### **Monday August 10, 2015**

Still no “great revelation”, but I have noticed in different Bible verses, devotionals and book readings, the importance of praying with focus and a specific intention. It was another thing we knew, but never really put into practice. We wrote down the things we are specifically praying for at this time: Purpose and direction, a house and more than enough. I know I need to be writing so I need to commit myself to that. Aaron was told to wake sleeping giants, but we do not really know what that looks like. How does he do that? We often feel completely clueless about God now. It is probably a good thing! Maybe it means that we have been unlearning the things that were partial truths, or not truth at all, and now God can begin to show us who he is, how to hear him and how to talk with him.

### **Friday August 14, 2015**

I need to be better about writing down when the kiddos say things about their faith or the things our journey has been teaching them. I guess because we have conversations all the time, I do not really think about it much. We had shared with some friends a conversation we had with Jack. Jack was talking about getting a car and taking care of it and then he said, “But, I always need to remember that God wants to use what I have to help others. So I might be sitting at the lunch table and God will say, ‘You need to give your car to that kid.’ and I will need to be willing to do that. I’d probably go drive it around the neighborhood first though.” Our friends were so impressed that he would realize that on his

own and that it was not a conversation mom and dad were having that he just agreed with. That is when my friend mentioned I need to be writing this stuff down.

I started and posted the intro blog for the new series we are going to do. We are calling it the Unabridged Series. We are completely opening up about everything, the good, the bad and the ugly. We feel like this is an important piece to us being able to take the next step in our journey and also to help people understand where our God thoughts are coming from. I pray that God will use it to speak into someone's life.

### **Saturday August 15, 2015**

It is a good thing that, most of the time, Aaron and I have our bad days on different days. Ha! Today is Aaron's day. He was saying how tired he is of everything before it was even 10am. Not a good sign! I fell like it is a good day so I will deflect his grumpies from the kiddos. He does that for me more often than I want to admit!

I have discovered that when I am tired my brain cannot focus on prayer at all!!! I was trying to pray the other night and I would stay focused for a few moments and all of a sudden I would be thinking about Bella's hair or cowboys or shoes or any other weird random thing! I do not really remember exactly what they were, but they were weird like that. The same thing happened again this morning. I will be sooo happy when we get a house where I can grab a cup of coffee in the morning and head to my study where I can listen to music and pray and meditate until I can focus. That will be so awesome!!! Soon, Lord, soon!!! I have been doing my best to try to have focused prayer where I am, but we are rarely in a place where I can really do that. The only place I am all by myself is in the shower and even then it is the rec center showers so there are all kinds of people in the bathroom or in the other showers next to mine.

### **Sunday August 16, 2015**

For two of the last three Sundays Pastor Jeff has gotten up to speak and said that the message he had prepared was not what God was wanting to say that morning. Both times what he did end up talking about were exactly what we needed to hear. Today he talked about the children of Israel complaining and how that led to forty years of wandering and the older generation not being able to enter the promise land. Their complaints were legitimate; no food, no water, etc. but it was the condition of their hearts that showed lack of trust and faith. I had had a conversation with Alex and Jack after I picked them up from school on Thursday about the need for me to be done complaining and being negative. If I feel like I am going to say something snarky or negative I will quickly follow it up with, "No, this could be the very day God does something! He could do something at any moment!"

Jack came with me to the food pantry this morning. On our way over there he asked why we never tell people we live in our van when they ask where we live. I told him that we have told a few people that we live in a "motor home". He said, "Yeah, but it's not a motor home. It's a van." We walked in the door of the food pantry and almost as soon as I set our box down, the sweet lady that helps run the

pantry came over and asked where in Spring Hill we live. We had seen her and her husband a couple of times at a local park and grocery store. I tried to avoid answering the question by saying that we used to live off Buckner Road road, but then she asked if that was where we still lived. I guess God was using Jack to prepare me for this moment. Ha! I told her that we are now living in our van. She immediately started thinking of all the different food in the pantry that would be non perishable and prepared on the go. She told us that we could take extras of certain things since we are not able to use everything in there and she offered us the use of her freezer and refrigerator if we want to store milk or cheese or something since she does not live too far away from where the kiddos go to school. I told her we had just seen her husband at the grocery store a few days earlier and had discussed talked to them about helping out at the food pantry. We exchanged numbers and she said she would give us a call if they ever needed help.

### **Friday August 21, 2015**

We have had a crazy week! The week that I decide to really focus on writing has become really busy. Isn't that just the way of it?!

Aaron went to a job fair at the school on Tuesday night to talk to Williamson County Schools Transportation about bus driving. He said he wanted to go in there and feel it out. He had seen yet another post on social media about the great need for bus drivers and said that if it did not have the title of "job" attached to it he would have done it a long time ago. So, he needed to find out if this was indeed God giving him the go ahead to take this job. He had texted his bus driver friend on Monday saying he was going to go to the job fair and could he use him as a reference. Our friend called back immediately and said, "Your ears must have been ringing! I was just talking to those guys and mentioned your name and said you would be great for the job!" He also gave Aaron the inside scoop on everything so when Aaron did go to the job fair he was only there for about 10 minutes because he already knew most of what they had to say. He called the transportation department after he filled out the online application and they set up an interview for Thursday afternoon. He went in for the interview and they basically told him the job was his if he wanted it. We talked about it some more and decided that if God wanted this to happen everything would work out and if not he put a halt to all of it. We have certainly seen him do that with other jobs! Ha! Here is [Aaron's post about the new job](#).

### **Tuesday August 25, 2015**

Another full weekend! We were at our friends' house helping them move things out and pack up the moving truck. Their house sold and they have a closing date so their move is very real now. We stayed at their house all weekend since there was so much to do. Bonus for us because we had a bathroom and shower so convenient! Yay! Before we left they gave all of us money for helping them move. The kiddos were so excited and more than likely they will spend it on food!! Haha!!!

Aaron heard from the bus garage again and he has an appointment for a physical tomorrow at 7:45am. Then he can go to the DOT and get his permit.

### **Wednesday August 26, 2015**

I went out for coffee with my BFF while Aaron had his physical for the CDL licensing. We talked about all that God has done in her life and ours, since we have stepped out in faith for different situations. We discussed the importance of fasting so that we can be in a place to hear Him and that she was going to fast before she attended a writer's retreat, so that her spirit would be in the right place. I had been feeling like I needed to fast again, so I told her I would fast and pray with her.

When I opened the devotion to do that night with the family it was about fasting. It talked about the supernatural power when fasting and prayer is combined. Then it challenged the reader to ask God when they should fast and what they should be fasting about. As I was reading I thought to myself, "I should fast on Mondays and Tuesdays." When I finished reading the kiddos were quiet for a moment, then Jack piped up and said, "I think you should fast two days a week." This is one of many reasons I love having the kiddos involved in all parts of our journey. They are learning to walk in faith at the same time we are and things that we have been thinking and praying about, individually, get confirmed by someone else.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 17 (September 2015)

By: Jenny

### Thursday September 2, 2015

Craziness! It is all craziness!!!!

I have been trying to get our unabridged series out on the blog, but we have been inundated by meetings, meetings everywhere! Meetings at the school, meetings at Starbucks, meetings at the bus garage...

We spent the week trying to get the first blog post written and helping our friends finalize their move. It was incredibly hard to go back over my journal entries. The only word I have to describe it is "heavy". There were a lot of emotions that we were working through. What I thought would be a single post turned into three. Mostly because it was a lot to process and I did not want to dump that much on people. It is one thing when I have a long blog that is full of my goofy, rambling thoughts, but a blog post full of crazy confused emotions is not fun!

We were very encouraged as we helped our friends with their move. Last year at this time their situation look completely hopeless. Now their second mortgage has been miraculously forgiven, they are selling their house, walking away with equity and relocating to a place they had wanted to move to for a long time. God can do something at any moment!

Two different times this week I have awakened in the middle of the night to the presence of God being so overwhelming, all I could do was cry and pray and pray and cry. It did not feel like intercessory prayer, it felt like a conversation with my good Dad and I was being overwhelmed with His love. It was so real and tangible, it was almost like I could touch it. I have never experienced God like that.

We finally got the first unabridged blog up yesterday. It caused quite a stir! Haha! I sent the link to my family first because we had not told them any of the behind the scenes details yet either. We had former co-workers contacting to make sure, first hand, that we actually were okay and new friends contacting our close friends to see if we were okay and if there was anything they could do.

Last night, well, really in the weeeeeee morning hours, 3:30 a.m. to be exact, we hear a THUMP THUMP THUMP on the van and hear a voice very loudly saying, "Sir, sir? Could I speak with you?" Aaron took down the curtain that was on his window and there are bright lights shining on and in the van from three different directions. There were three police cars surrounding us, all officers were out of their cars, one behind the van and two at Aaron's window. They asked us what we were doing there and Aaron responded, "Sleeping." That is so funny to me now!! Haha! The 3:30 a.m. brain does not work very fast! They informed us that "—" does not allow cars to park overnight in their parking lot. Apparently trucks and campers are allowed, but not cars and vans. They asked us if we have anywhere we can go and we told them we are homeless, but we could probably find a friend to let us sleep over.

The officer speaking to us was incredibly compassionate and helpful and had another officer start calling different shelters to see if they would take us in. I did freak out a little at that point. I know that we are not supposed to be taking government assistance or seeking out help from shelters, but how do you tell a police officer “that is not what God wants us to do.”? I really had to pray to calm myself down. They heard back from various sources and none of the shelters take whole families. The officer that did the majority of the talking gave Aaron his card and told him that if we ever needed help to contact him. They asked us if we had a job or money and Aaron told them yes, and that he had recently been hired as a bus driver. We then assured all of them that we had friends that would take us in and that they could follow us there if they would like. They said that was not necessary and sent us on our way.

We drove to a friends’ house and parked in their driveway because we did not want to freak anyone out by pounding on the door at 4 o’clock in the morning. Aaron and I prayed individually for about an hour. We both had tons of things going through our heads that we had to give over to God. Aaron was doubting the whole “adventure” and wondering, “Are we even right? Maybe we should stop all this nonsense and get the kids somewhere stable.” I was freaking out about the kids being taken away from us. I knew that was fear talking and it was not God. I mentally drew a picture of me placing our situation and our children in my hand and holding my hand out to God, asking Him to take it, to hold my babies and remove my fear and replace it with His peace and love. I felt much, much better after that, but the fear has come back a couple of times during the day. I just hold my hand out again. Fear is not from God and I am not going to accept it. Both of us were encouraged during our Bible reading today with verses from Isaiah 61 and Psalm 73:23-28. God has a glorious destiny prepared for those that serve him. Little things, like our Bible verses coinciding when we have done individual devotions, reminds us that God is with us and knows where we are. Another thing that encouraged me was the fact that I actually laughed as we left that parking lot. I had just faced one of my biggest fears and had not been shaken. Doubts came flooding in afterward, but during the situation God’s peace was surrounding us.

### **Friday September 4, 2015**

Definitely feeling “bleh” today. We were going to take the kiddos to KFC for the buffet last night for a fun pick me up after such a crazy night on Wednesday, but a friend called needing a babysitter so we all went over to their house to babysit instead. They had ordered pizza for us and I made some mac n’ cheese to go with it. Jack in particular was thrilled. Mac n’ cheese is his favorite comfort food. Everyone was able to take showers while we were there since we were not going to be able to make it to the rec center. It was a nice change of pace. We were able to chill out on the couch and eat hot food and watch PBS. Haha!!

It was another stinking hot night last night! Once again I woke up feeling gross and smelly. Aaron is still in a leftover funk from Wednesday night. He is unsettled and says things like, “I don’t understand

what God is doing and I don't know where we are supposed to go. Why can't God let us know something? I don't understand any of this or even God! Why don't I get to understand?" I have no answers to give him. I feeling disgusting, hot and sweaty and that is all I feel at this moment. So, I give him our "favorite" answer, "I don't know. We will have to wait for God to tell us when it is time." We dove to the Tennessee DMV so Aaron could take the CDL test, after we dropped Bella off at school. I was still exhausted from horrible sleep, so I stayed in the van and slept while he went in to take the test. He came out in a worse mood than when he went in and had more questions for God. He had failed two of the four tests. "Why would God set all this up just to let him fail? God controls the weather, couldn't he have cooled it down so we would have slept better? One of the things I have been imagining is that God has been giving supernatural help to the kiddos in their school work so that they are able to focus and do well even if they have interrupted sleep. I guess not." And again I have no words, I am still disgusting, hot and sweaty. It is probably better that way. Word filters tend to be broken when the body is uncomfortable and there has been a lack of sleep. Aaron sat there for awhile and then said, "Well, it wouldn't be a time of perseverance if it were easy and we didn't have to persevere." After more contemplating, he remembered his original feelings about the test. When he first prayed about taking the test he had felt that he should wait for next week, when we would be house-sitting for our friends. He felt pressure to take it sooner because he had started over thinking it and wanted to get it over with, so we could start having regular checks coming in. He wondered if maybe the whole thing flopped because he knew what he was supposed to do, but then changed it to a plan he liked better.

## **Tuesday September 8, 2015**

Our friends are away at a conference/vacation for almost two weeks and we are house-sitting for them. We have been here since Saturday morning. The timing was wonderful because the rec center was closed all weekend, due to Labor Day, and I had told Aaron I did not know what we should do because that would be three days with no showers for us. GUH-ROSS!!! We prayed asking God what to do and a day or so later our friend told me they were heading out of town and asked if we would mind house-sitting? Well, no, we wouldn't mind at all! Thank you very much! And thank you, Lord!

Saturday was a really hard day for me. I was not expecting that. It was wonderful to be able to shower and spend the rest of the day in my PJs, but I was so sad. Aaron reminded me that we need to be thankful for whatever the Lord gives us and for however long. I know that is true and I am thankful for this time of hot food, convenient bathrooms and horizontal rest, but it still hurts. It feels like I am only getting to play or pretend something that I really want. The bright spot has been the time we have had just hanging out with the kiddos. We purposely did not do anything over the weekend except go to church.

Alyn Jones spoke on Sunday and put Christ's sacrifice into a perspective I had never seen before. If you were \$100,000 in debt and someone came to you and paid that debt it would be amazing, but you would still need money to eat, pay bills and maintain a house and vehicle, etc. To actually be able to

thrive you would need more than the debt being paid off. When Jesus died on the cross he paid our debt, he brought us to zero. His death means that we no longer have debt, but left at just that, we do not have life either. He rose to life and gave us His spirit, so that we could find and have that life. He wants to bring us to a place of honor, a place where we can accept the good that God has for us and bring that hope to others and help them be lifted up in honor as well. They will be able to see that they have worth in the eyes of their Father.

We are still getting intense questions on our Unabridged blogs. The unfortunate thing about social media is that a lot is lost in translation. People cannot hear when I am being sarcastic or tongue in cheek (hint: almost all the time) or whether I am whining or simply stating a fact. On our end we cannot always tell if a person is simply asking a question, or if they are genuinely angry or upset with us. For a long time this was very upsetting and we would not even know how to respond to the questioning, but God has really been talking to us about the importance of obedience to Him at any cost and that has given us a confidence that we did not have before. The hesitancy and sometimes even fear of answering people's questions is being removed from us. We are able to say "I don't know" or "I don't understand either" to people and actually be okay with it. We were not okay with that before. Who wants to be living a life they do not understand? If you are wanting a life obedient to God that is exactly the kind of life you have to live. He does not give the whole plan. That really stinks sometimes...most of the time...okay, all the time.

### **Friday September 11, 2015**

I am praying continually that God would be glorified and His love and goodness will be shown through our life. I do not understand any of what is going on right now. I keep thinking of Joseph sitting in a prison. We never see anything significant happening to him in that prison other than meeting two of Pharaoh's servants. I need to be okay with whatever God is doing and why he has us here. Maybe it is for one person. I have never before thought of Joseph's prison experience through the eyes of the baker and wine taster. Were they thrown in prison just to meet Joseph and be shown that God can speak and reveal Himself through dreams and that He is with His children no matter where they are? More "I don't know", but it is an interesting thing to ponder.

Around 4:00/4:30 a.m. I heard a knock on our friend's front door. The boys were sleeping downstairs, so I quick hurried down there because I did not want them answering the door by themselves when no one else is awake. My momma heart hopes that common sense would prevail, but my momma heart also knows that is usually wishful thinking. I got downstairs and no one was awake. I was upstairs sound asleep with a fan on and it had woke me up. How could they have slept through that? No one was at the door. So weird. Nothing in my dream had been about someone knocking on the door. I can distinctly remember how the knock went, it had a specific little rhythm. And no, it was not the da-dada-da-da...da da. I went back to bed and thought maybe the Lord was trying to get my attention. I thought of Revelation 3:20 "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will

come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.” I have no idea what any of this could mean, but I am writing it down because I could find out later that it has meaning.

Aaron went and took his CDL permit test again this morning and passed. He is going to email the person he has been in contact with in the transportation department to let them know he is ready to begin training.

### **Sunday September 13, 2015**

One of the things said this morning at church was about the importance of seasons and not trying to hurry through the seasons of life thereby missing what God is wanting to establish in you. Our life seasons are not on a time table, they are on a comprehension and growth level. The way to get through a season is to allow whatever needs to happen, to happen. Even winter (which most people would associate with death) is not death, it is rest. Do not fight the rest. Rest is where your roots are going deeper and you receive the strength to endure the next growing season.

### **Thursday September 17, 2015**

I sat down to write this morning and was not able to. I suddenly burst into tears and had a full body convulsing sob session for nearly an hour. I know God has good things for us and good plans in store, but a lot of life right now looks so disheartening. I have begged God to let this part of the journey end, and if it is not time for it to be over to please give me the strength to endure it instead. Out of these feelings I wrote [“Winter is not Death, it is Rest”](#)

### **Monday Spetember 21, 2015**

Karen, the sweet lady at the church’s food pantry contacted us Thursday evening asking if we were available to help pick up a load of bread that had been donated. I dropped Aaron off for his bus driver training and then took her with me to pick up the bread. We talked about our story, how we came to be in Tennessee and what God has been speaking to us since we have been here and more specifically, what He has said recently. I told her of my desire to have a safe place that is always open for people to come, rest and find hope and encouragement. She told me about a man from Grace Center called Papa Joe. He has a similar passion for certain areas of Nashville and has been able to start multiple ministries there. We got the bread and brought it to the church and got it put away and went on our separate ways for the day. The older boys were at the school that night. There was a football game and Alex had parking lot detail with JROTC and Jack wanted to watch the game with his friends. We took the two littles with us to the rec center to swim and then went and got a 1/2 gallon of ice cream to share. Nothing like sabotaging your workout as soon as you are done working out! haha! Karen contacted again saying they had some milk for us and asked if we would like to come over and pick it up? When we arrived they gave us the milk and some pudding snacks for the kiddos and also let us borrow a movie that had been made about Papa Joe called “Unconditional”.

We had a work day at the school on Saturday for the upcoming theater production. This was the first time some of the parents had seen us since our unabridged blogs had gone out. They were very sweet and caring and asked if we were truly okay and if there was anything they could do for us.

Sunday we were at church and often times in between worship and the pastor getting up to speak, they will take time to let everyone chat for a little bit with the people near them. Karen and her husband, Bill, happened to be in front of us so we gave them hugs and Karen told me that Papa Joe was there and she wanted to introduce us to him. So she took Aaron and I out to the hallway where Papa Joe was talking with some other people. We waited until they were finished and she introduced us and we told him the “Reader’s Digest” version of our story. There were parts that he completely connected with because God had given him the same principles, but had used different word pictures. Like Aaron’s 4×4 stack of one hundred dollar bills; God told Joe to use invisible money. What at first we thought was just a sweet lady wanting to introduce us to more people turned into something that felt like a God connection. He gave us a verse in Proverbs that had been encouraging to him, got our contact information and then prayed over us.

I don’t know what prompted me, but when we all got back in the van after church I asked the kiddos if they would be okay always living in the van, if the manifest power of God was with us and wherever we went people were being healed, or we would have words to speak directly to situations they were going through, or raising people from the dead, etc. They were quiet for a minute and then all of them, except Alex, agreed. Alex was not sure. He said all those things would be really cool, but he is really tired of living in a van and just wants to have a house to live in again. I said, “Lucky for you, you only have two years left with us and then you can legally move out and get your own place. Bella is stuck with us for nine more years.” Bella chimed in and said, “I’m glad!! If God does stuff like that I don’t care if I always live in a van...I just hope he would give us a bigger van.” Hahaha!!!

### **Wednesday September 23, 2015**

I spent the whole day with my bestie yesterday. The whole day! So fun!! I was originally going to go over to her house to do laundry, but when we got to the storage unit, after dropping the kiddos off at school, the gate to the units would not open so we could not get in to get our laundry. So, we spent the day talking and drinking coffee. Yeah, it was pretty rough. When it was time for Aaron get the kiddos back from school she invited all of us to stay for a pizza and movie night. Aaron also picked up ingredients to have root beer floats. We sat down with our pizza and root beer floats and watched “Unconditional”. Now I am even more excited to have more interaction with Papa Joe and his family. What an amazing story!

### **Saturday September 26, 2015**

I went with my bestie and her husband to a church conference that was in Nashville on Friday night. Her husband was helping with recording, or sound, or something technical like that and I wanted to go

to see my cousin, whom I had not seen in years! Yay!! We ended up staying later than first intended, because some extra recording needed to be done at the end of the services and so we did not get to go out to eat with anybody. The three of us ended up stopping at a Steak n' Shake in Franklin. Our waitress was hilarious and pretty quickly picked up on my bestie's inability to order due to indecision and had a wonderful time of razzing her about it. We left there around 2:30 a.m. and I konked out when I got back to the van. We had another work day at the school so we had to be up at 8:00 a.m. There were a lot of cars parked around us, so Aaron moved to another part of the parking lot to fold up blankets and get the van a little more "normal". We also needed to get the kiddos some breakfast out of our boxes in the back. While he was doing all of that, I noticed a person that had been sitting in their car for awhile getting out of their vehicle. It was the waitress from Steak n' Shake! I waved at her and she came over to talk to me. She said she had been sitting there because she was trying to decide what to do; she had just gotten off work and had only made \$20 in tips all night. Her family was getting ready to move to be with her mom who had recently become disabled and she was needed to rent a truck and get moving supplies, but also needed groceries and other essentials. She had been sitting there trying to figure out what was the most important and what could wait until later. We had recently felt like we needed to put money aside so that we would have something to help someone if they needed it, so I was able to give that to her so she could at least get more groceries. God has good timing...sometimes.

I had to be at the theater work day in the clothes I had worn to the conference last night (which were rather dressy and had been slept in), because my sweet honey was so distracted from having the kiddos by himself, taking them to the rec center, feeding them and then getting all the dirty clothes and extra stuff put in the storage unit for the night that he forgot to bring my bag with my change of clothes. I did not really mind that much, I just knew I looked silly. I told one of the moms about it and she laughed and said to look at it as a good way to keep everyone guessing what I could be up to. Haha!

### **Sunday September 27, 2015**

Aaron and the boys got to help in the food pantry this morning before church and see a little bit of the process of how it is run. They marked out bar codes and restocked shelves.

The message today was about Abraham and how God had seen that he was faithful before he gave him any promises or made any covenants with him. It was because of that faithfulness that God chose him and gave him a promise. From there Abraham grew in faith and believed God's promise without being able to see how that promise could become reality. We need to partner our faith with what God has said to us before it comes to pass in order to grow in our faith. I thought about the times over the last weeks when I have decided to share our story and what God has said to us and how freeing that felt. Up to now I had only been sharing our story and God words with people that I thought would understand, or had already been where we were. As Pastor Jeff was talking this morning, I realized that I have been holding back not only out of fear, but out of a lack of faith. My new prayer is for strength to share our

story, or whatever God wants me to say, so that my faith will grow and God will see someone that is willing to work in any part of His kingdom.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 18 (October/November 2015)

By: Jenny

### Monday October 5, 2015

We are completely amused with [Aaron's work situation](#). Before he actually started driving the bus he said that he would do it without pay, because it was a need in the community and he felt like it was something God wanted him to do. God must have taken him seriously because he still hasn't been paid. So for those that thought Aaron getting a job is the answer to our "problems", think again! Even when you get a job God can create circumstances where you aren't getting paid and you're still trusting in him. Haha! It really is quite amusing.

We have had money from my birthday that we have been using and we got down to where we only had enough for one more tank of gas. We were starting to get a little bit antsy wondering if God was going to come through for us, or if Aaron was going to get paid, or if something else would happen. Even though we were amused we still had to take control over our worry and fear. I know, I know, you'd think we'd be over that by now. I think (and pray) we are over the part where we are ruled by worry and fear. I don't know if it ever completely goes away simply because we are human. Hopefully I'll have the answer to that someday and I can let everyone know. We spent the week praying whenever worry or fear would start up in our minds and telling the Lord what our needs were. I received a message on Friday telling me to check our Paypal account. Someone had sent us \$1,000. Thank you, Lord, for speaking to people and thank you, people, for listening to the Lord!!

We were challenged by Alyn Jones on Sunday morning to live in wonder and not cynicism. People often say that if they saw miracles they would believe that God was real, that he cares about people and that he is with them. That is simply not true. We only need to look in the Bible for examples of the Israelis being right in the middle of a miracle and complaining about what God was doing. It isn't a matter of God working, it is a matter of our hearts. If we greet every good thing in life with doubt and cynicism, eventually that is all we will be able to see. What would happen if we lived in childlike wonder of what God can do and we never put him in a box? God himself calls us to imagine what great things He has in store for us and then tells us what He has planned is beyond all of that.

### Wednesday October 28, 2015

Yikes!! I haven't written in a long time. This month has flown by! Aaron is driving his own route now with Williamson County Schools and still has not been paid. Hahahaha!! This is just nuts!!! Anytime he has tried to talk with someone about it they are either out of the office or they were so busy with other things they couldn't get to him. He finally tracked someone down and was told he had been lost in the shuffle and wouldn't be paid until November 13th. What?!! It is so hilariously ridiculous! We have decided this just has to be God doing something because how else does that happen? Aaron has been

working there since September! But, God is still proving that He knows where we are and is more than able to take care of us because all of our bills, gas and groceries are always taken care of.

Our friends went out of town for a long weekend and allowed us to stay at their house again. Alex had a play at school all weekend, Jack wanted to go to a football game Friday night and a birthday party Saturday night, and there was a cast party after the last show on Saturday. It worked out perfectly that we were at their house because I was able to leave Aaron and the two littles at the house to chill out while the other two ran around in all their social madness. Normally all of us are along for everyone's social madness since our wheels are our house, for now.

### **Thursday November 12, 2015**

God is good! Our situation is still the same, but I keep singing "Good Good Father" because it helps me stay focused on God's goodness instead of what looks like the negatives in our life. We had a couple of rough days last week. We were down to \$10 in the bank. It was really bothering Aaron and he asked me if I thought he should call his mom and ask to borrow some money. I didn't feel like we should, but I also didn't feel like I needed to try to talk him out of it this time. He contacted his mom and asked to borrow \$200 until he gets paid. She sent it through Paypal so we had access to it right away. The kiddos knew we were really low on funds so when we were planning what to get from the store for supper that night Jack wanted to know how we got money. We told him that Aaron had asked Granny and she sent it. Jack threw his hands in the air and said, "God would have sent the money if you would have waited!!" Max responded to that and said, "It's ok, Jack. Dad just couldn't handle it anymore and needed to fix it, so he did. That happens sometimes." Haha!!! I so love seeing and hearing their responses to this faith journey.

We stayed in a hotel last weekend because I got sick from something I ate. It was better for everyone involved that we go ahead and spend the money for that rather than deal with me and my issues in a van. Hehe. We looked around the room and all agreed that we would be ok with living in a space that size. I'm sure because of our human nature we would grow tired of it, but right now it would be great! It's amazing what we find ourselves being content with when most everything else has been stripped away. We decided that once Aaron does finally start getting paid that we would try to get a hotel at least for weekends so we could have a place to relax and lay flat and, added bonus, free breakfast!

The kids had the day off school for Veteran's Day yesterday. Aaron had to go in for a bus drivers meeting for about four hours in the morning. When we went to pick him up he was sitting with our friend, that is also a bus driver, in his truck. He came over to talk to us and started telling the kiddos how lucky they are to have such loving parents and that there are kids all over the country that have nothing and in addition to nothing have abusive or addict parents and those kids would give anything to have what they have. He told them that it doesn't matter where you live, whether it's a great big mansion or a tiny trailer, as long as you have a loving family. He told us that he really loves our family and has adopted us as his own. He gave us a note and a bag of candy for each of the kids. After he left

we read the note and inside was \$25. The note said that Aaron had mentioned going to see a movie together on our day off and he wanted to contribute to our family fun. As far as we know he still doesn't know about our living situation, so when he talked about the greatest thing you can have is the love of your family it really caused the kiddos to think.

We still get weary of the craziness of getting ready in a van and having to shower at the Rec. center and use public bathrooms all the time (so gross), but we keep holding on to the promise that God is leading us, will give us a house and has more than enough for us to be a blessing to people. I truly believe that He will do exactly what He says he will do. A friend posted a verse on Facebook that reminded me of God's faithfulness: "Then Abraham waited patiently, and he received what God had promised. Now when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question that oath is binding. God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us." Hebrews 6:15-18

### **November 18, 2015**

Aaron got a paycheck!! Huzzah! We stayed at a hotel over the weekend. I am loving the fact that we can get great deals online!! Aaron took the older boys to the high school football game. Jack was wanting to go and be social and Alex was going because a JROTC cadet raises the American flag at the beginning of a game and it was his honor to do it for that game. I got to hang out at the hotel with Max and Bella and binge watch HGTV. Ha!! We are debating on whether we should be getting hotel rooms every weekend, or if we should be saving that money. We came to the conclusions that we don't feel like we shouldn't be doing it and if there is ever a weekend where God doesn't want us to do that He is more than capable of letting us know!

My grandma had surgery on her eyes because she has macular degeneration. She hadn't been on any kind of social media because she couldn't see very well. Now that her eyes are better she's been keeping up with us by reading and sharing every one of our blogs and posts on our family facebook page. She has sent both Aaron and I numerous messages and completely believes that God is with us and has something great in store for us. She has been an amazing source of encouragement! We are so thankful for all of our encouragers!!

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 19 (December 2015)

By: Jenny

### Monday December 7, 2015

Yay for regular paychecks... finally! Haha! That whole thing was so weird. But, it's all sorted out now, and it's all good.

I looked into booking a hotel for the three weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas. I was able to find a deal for about \$1000, but we're not sure that's what we really want to do. We decided to wait and pray about it some more.

We went to visit my family for Thanksgiving. All the brave/crazy souls went out shopping Thanksgiving evening and the sane/normal people stayed home to watch my sisters' little ones. Hmmmm, maybe the crazy vs sane is the other way around. Ha! It really was tons of fun!! I think it's going to have to be a new tradition. The two older boys came with us. They had gotten money from their great grandma and they scored great deals on new clothes. It's weird for me to have them actually enjoy shopping for clothes now and even weirder that I can send them off on their own to do it. We had lots of great conversation with my grandma. She is both proud of us, for living out our faith, and horrified that this is what God is asking of us for right now. Us too, Grandma, us too! She said she didn't think she could have that kind of faith. We were able to talk about the importance of not comparing our faith to other people's faith, or our story to other people's story, but to simply listen and know what God has said, for our own lives, and walk in that no matter what.

We celebrated Christmas early with my mom since we won't be able to be back for Christmas. She had been to Scotland in October so we all got fun souvenirs and yummy cookies, caramels and chocolates! Aaron was able to visit with his former co-workers and the day he went happened to be someone's last day, so he was able to be there to celebrate with them. A handful of them have stayed in contact with him since our move, so it was nice for him to chat with them face to face again.

When we got back from Thanksgiving break Izzy got sick and missed the first couple days back to school. She slept for almost 2 days straight. She was better by the end of the week and was able to go on her field trip to see Charlotte's Web at the children's theatre. She was panicked all week that she might miss it. The older boys wanted to go to their school's state championship football game an hour and a half away. They both had reliable rides, so we let them go and got a hotel for the weekend, since they were going to be out so late and because Izzy was still not quite 100%.

I have been feeling like we need to check in with the kiddos to see how they are all doing/feeling. It has been awhile since we've done that. Even when life isn't perfect, it is so easy to get stuck in a routine and lose contact with each other. We were able to talk on Sunday night. Izzy said that she still feels like

we are supposed to be in Williamson County, in TN, but she is tired of living in a van. Max basically said the same thing. Jack said he still feels like we should be here, but he feels like he did when it was time to leave our friends' house; we know it's time for something to change, but we don't know what to do. Alex's response was similar to Jack's. He said he doesn't feel the same peace he did when we first started living in the van, because it feels like something else needs to happen now. We asked them what they thought we should do since there doesn't seem to be that peace or surety anymore. They said they thought we should fast and pray for the week to see what God has to say about it. Talking with them is always so amazing. Aaron and I had been feeling the disquiet as well, but hadn't really been able to put a finger on the feeling until Jack mentioned that it felt like it did when it was time to move on from our friends' house. We are continually amazed at the insight and wisdom that God gives our children.

I am still working on the Sanders Family Unabridged series. Ugh!! The first couple of months were really hard to go over because of all the questions and fear we had. I was re-living all those emotions again as I was writing them out for the blog. Heavy stuff, Maynard. I just started reading April's journal entries and there is definitely a shift in my writing. The fear has been replaced with peace and joy. There are still questions and occasional worry, even now, but we're not clouded with it like we used to be.

### **Wednesday December 9, 2015**

We're trying to find the balance of trust now that we have regular paychecks again. What Aaron gets paid isn't enough to get us into an apartment, let alone a house, so there isn't much to be frivolous with anyway, but we still want to make sure we are being wise. The first couple of paychecks flew out of our pocket, due to staying in hotels over the weekends, and we want to make sure we're not just throwing it at all kinds of other things as well. I still firmly believe that God will continue to meet our needs, so if there is a time when his paycheck doesn't cover what we need for those two weeks, God will step in and provide.

Shortly after our conversation about that, Aaron was sitting in his bus and noticed he had missed a call while driving. He did a reverse search and found out that the number was from Grace Center, the church we have been attending. He called the number and got one of the secretaries who told him that we had been chosen to receive a gift card for Christmas from Grace Center. That befuddled us! For lack of a better way of saying it, we have been invisible there. Our only conclusion is that God was hiding us, because they are the most loving caring people I think we have ever come across. So, to find out we had been chosen for a gift card when we didn't think people even realized we were there was kind of crazy! We had noticed a spike in hits on the blog, so we wondered if maybe Bill and Karen (the couple that runs the food pantry) had mentioned us to the leadership and they had done a little "research" on us. When we went to pick up the gift card, we asked how/why we'd been chosen. We were told that the leadership gets together, along with the people overseeing the food pantry, and they choose families that they know could use some financial help for the holidays and our name had been mentioned by

Bill and Karen. When we opened the card there was a \$300 gift card inside. See?!?!?! I knew God would keep taking care of us!!

### **Thursday December 24, 2015**

I am so behind in writing and we have had quite a full couple of weeks. I am going to try to keep the dates in order so I don't miss anything.

### **Thursday December 10th**

There is a little bit of tension because we haven't had a marvelous revelation or breakthrough as to why we are feeling unsettled. I checked my email while I was waiting to drop Bella off at school. I had a message from a lady that said she had met Aaron the previous weekend, when he came to pick Jack up after the football game. She and her husband had driven a bunch of kids to the game. She admitted that she had done some snooping over the weekend, because she wanted to know what kind of person her child was hanging out with. After some social media digging she found our individual and family Facebook pages and from there our blog. She said it had completely undone her and she has not been able to stop thinking about our story. She wants to get together sometime to talk in person. She said she doesn't normally reach out to people that way, but our story had messed with her so bad that she was afraid if she didn't get it off her chest she would attack me in a big bear hug the next time she saw me at a school event. She didn't know she needn't have worried. She's dealing with the queen of exuberant expression! Haha!! I cried when I read the email because we have been fasting and praying all week for God to show us some kind of direction, or confirmation, or something and then we get this. It was like He was showing us, again, that He is working when it looks like nothing is happening and nothing makes sense. I read the email to Aaron when I went to pick him up and he cried as well. He responded to her when we got to the library and let her know that hugs don't scare me and we looked forward to meeting her. We ended up seeing her that night at a choir concert at the high school. I went ahead and gave her a big hug since she had mentioned she might not be able to withstand the impulse anyway.

### **Friday December 11th**

We went to a friends' house for an early Christmas dinner. It was supposed to have been a handful of families, but everyone either had end of semester school stuff or had sick kids and it ended up being just us. It was fine because we hadn't been able to catch up with them in quite awhile and we all had lots to share. I opened my email to share some of the things that lady had said and they were very happy and encouraged along with us. I noticed that I had a Paypal notification as I was getting ready to log out, so I opened it up. Someone had sent us \$300 and an anonymous, encouraging note saying, "God continue to bless you on your adventure." Wow! Thank you, Lord, for your continued faithfulness and provision! We ended the night with an invitation for a movie night (Elf!!!) and sleep over which we gladly accepted.

## **Tuesday December 15th**

We met with the lady that had emailed us this morning. We talked with her about our story to help her process what she had read. She said that she is very torn about what to do. She wants to help, but isn't sure what she should do to help. She offered to watch the kiddos whenever we need someone or to help with transportation to places, but she wanted to do more and wasn't sure what else would be helpful. We assured her that her prayers and friendship were the best blessing of all!! I'm going to paraphrase here because I don't remember her exact words, but basically it was that Aaron's writing slapped her in the face and made her think and my writing stabbed her in the heart and tore her emotions. Yay, us!! Haha! We loved hearing that though, because last week Aaron and I had talked about how well we compliment each other. We discussed that when we share our story with large groups we should do it together because he is so straightforward, even harsh sometimes, and I can come along and be the comfort and peace maker to make everybody feel better. Haha!!! She let us know that reading our journey has caused her to want to break out of the routine she is in and find out who she is. Woohoo!! That's exactly what we are continually praying for; that somehow our life will help others to step out and find their identity and the adventure God has for them. Waking up sleeping giants.

## **Friday December 18th**

We've been in a hotel since Wednesday. We decided since it was cold, and we had the funds to do it, we might as well do it! [Insert moment of praise for Priceline] We also thought it would be easier to stage our departure, to Illinois for Christmas break, from a hotel room instead of trying to pack things up out of the storage unit which is the usual routine. Aaron received all kinds of adorable cards and gifts from the kids on the bus. Bonus for me, he ended up with about \$75 in Starbucks gift cards! Ha!! Isabella's teacher is very passionate about helping the Ronald McDonald House and visiting the kiddos at the children's hospital. She asked that instead of gifting her with anything for Christmas that people would consider bringing in donations for those two causes. She gave everyone a list of items needed. Bella was so excited! I took her to the store where she picked out snacks, drinks, toys, coloring books and crayons. She kept talking about how much fun those kids will have playing with those things. If we had been staying in town, for Christmas break, we would have been able to go with her teacher to pass the items out. She hopes that maybe next year we can stay in town to go help with that.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 20 (January 2016)

By: Jenny

### Thursday January 7, 2016

We had a wonderful Christmas break with Aaron's family in Illinois. It was restful and uneventful until Grandma Sanders decided to give us a scare on New Year's Day. Long story short, John and Aaron ended up taking her to the hospital where they did tests and found she'd had a stroke and had some bleeding in her brain. They weren't going to be able to operate on it because of her age. Thankfully she recovered to the point where she was able to be moved to a different hospital for therapy. She won't be able to move back into her own house for awhile, she'll be living with one of Aaron's aunts while she regains her strength, but we are so thankful she's ok.

The thought of the transition back to the van was difficult again. We used to dread the thought of it because we were fighting it, then we started to accept it because it was where we knew we were supposed to be, now we're back to dreading it again because that feeling of "rightness" is gone. Ugh. We shared the email we had received last month with the kiddos and talked about being frustrated with it never looking like anything is happening, but things really are happening. People are reading our story and instead of the judgment, that our fear tells us people will have, they often respond with a desire to experience more of God for themselves, which is exactly what we pray will happen.

We were able to have a little life lesson on prayer recently. Because they involve other people's stories I'm going to be very vague, but the lesson is the same even without knowing details. Last year we prayed about two different situations months apart, but we were praying about them with a self focused point of view. I have now heard stories that have shown me that all of that prayer had nothing to do with us and everything to do with the people currently involved in the situation. This is my take away: we often pray thinking we know exactly what it is that needs to happen for a situation or a person. We don't stop to ask God what his feelings on that certain topic are because, well, it's quite obvious what they should be. Often we are so focused on the things in our life that we only pray that our situation changes, and we miss the fact that God calls us to pray for others, in the middle of our own trials. Dude, I've been smacked in the face. I kind of knew that before and if I had been in a conversation about it would have agreed with the arguing side that we need to wait for God's direction, even in prayer, but I obviously did not have it in practice in my own life. We simply don't know what the best outcome is in any circumstance. Only our Daddy knows that. My new endeavor is to quiet myself in prayer for any situation and find out what my daddy's heart has to say about it and pray that way, even if I don't understand.

While we were in Illinois one of my devotions was talking about Romans 10:17 "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of God." This was another thing that has challenged me. I wrote out some of my thoughts about it in [this blog post](#).

**Friday January 29, 2016**

We are still waiting for God to show us what this unsettling is all about. Waiting...waiting...and a little more waiting...

I do believe our “invisibility cloak” at church is gone! Our first service back after break we sat by a couple we had seen before, but had never interacted with. Stop! First I’m going to interject some thoughts I’d been having. While we were in Illinois I thought to myself, “When we get back I am going to talk to Pastor Jeff.” (I had the thought over the summer that if he and his wife were to pray for us, we’d have our house. Well, I’m sick and tired of not being in a house and if it’s a supernatural thing then I want the pastor praying about it!) During church this first morning back I thought, “This is the morning! I’m going to talk to Jeff today.” At the end of service he went back and stood by the doors as people were leaving and would hug, shake hands, pat on the back, whatever, as people would go out the door. He’s never done that before so I thought, “It’s a sign!!” haha!! We had sat next to a couple that we had seen around church before but had never talked to and they struck up a conversation with Alex as everyone was waiting to leave their rows. They had a son that had been in theater and were enjoying theater nerd speak. We started talking with them as well and it wasn’t long until we were swapping life stories. Interestingly they were very similar, so we stayed there talking to them for quite awhile. I thought maybe I wasn’t meant to talk with Jeff that morning since we don’t normally connect to people like that and he was busy talking with people by the time we were done chatting. I went to the food pantry and got what we needed and headed back to the van, but it kept bothering me that I should talk with Jeff. I thought to myself, “Ok, I’ll go in there to talk to him, but only if he is still standing by the doors when I get in there.” I walked back in and there he was standing by the doors. I walked over to him and apologized in advance for my inability to talk properly because I’d probably start crying. He was so so kind!! If there was anyone with the heart of a pastor it’s him. I shared a snippet of our story with him and he held my hand the whole time and would hug me when I started to tear up. He and his wife, Becky, prayed for our family and prayed over my feet that wherever we walked would be blessed. Jeff asked me to follow him to his vehicle because he wanted to give me the cash he had. He apologized that it wasn’t a lot, but he wanted to give it to us. When the offering was collected that morning they let us know that none of that money was going to be staying in the church it was all going to go out to help a local ministry. I felt like I needed to give whatever I had in my purse which happened to be \$45. When Jeff gave me the cash he had in his car it was \$48. I’m not really sure what is going to come of me talking with them and them praying for us, but I had felt like it was an important thing to have happen, so there we go!

The next week we found out where the offering was being given: End Slavery Tennessee. It’s an organization that helps rescue, council and rehabilitate girls that have been in the sex trade. The lady there to accept the donation had no idea that was why she was there, she thought she was there to speak to us. They let her come up and share a video so we could see what the organization does and how they help women. When the video was over they interrupted her and told her they and tricked her about why

she was there and that we actually had some money we'd like to donate to her organization. They did a fun ticker type thing on the screen starting in the pennies place and moving through the different dollar places. In the end the ticker stopped at a little over \$300,000!!! The place erupted in applause and whoops, hollers, whistles and tons of tears. None of us knew how much had been donated either. She was so overwhelmed and thankful! It was such an awesome thing to be part of!!

We had seen the couple we talked to the previous week as we came in the doors that morning and waved at them. About half way through the songs the husband came over and gave Aaron some money. He said he felt like he was supposed to give that to us. When we talked with them afterward he told us he had felt it so strong he had left at the beginning of service to go to the ATM to get the money. Another man, that we had met last year, but not spoken to since came up to Aaron. He said that God had given him a word for Aaron a while ago, but he hadn't seen him to give it to him. He asked for Aaron's email so he could send it to him. Aaron checked email after we left and this was the word: "December 13, 2015 – Yesterday was a significant day. Romans 12:12 Keep your eyes on Him! Trust Him! Take the next step!" It is both wonderful and aggravating. I heard that same message of stepping into something months ago so it's neat to hear that confirmed through someone else, but it's aggravating because we don't have anything definite to "step into". Not that we are seeing right now anyway.

We met with Pastor Tony on Thursday. We weren't really sure what we were going to talk about, but we had multiple people tell us they thought he would be a good person to talk to so we thought, "Why not?!" We gave him a brief synopsis of our story, brief as in almost two hours...haha! He sat quietly through the whole thing and at the end made this observation. He told us that our story causes tremors in people's lives; it shakes them and causes them to have to make a decision. He said that he was having to make a decision even then: Do I help come up with a plan to "rescue" these people or do I trust God enough to take care of them? Other reactions are a self examination to see what God is saying to them or anger and distancing themselves from us. So often we have been hesitant to talk about different things going on in our life because of these reactions. For whatever reason his observation has really freed us from that. It was like God was showing us that those reactions are ok and that is what our story is meant to be doing. Regardless of those reactions we continue to walk in what we know He has told us to do. All of that is "well, duh!", but it was something that finally penetrated our thick heads and gave us strength. He also gave us two passages of Scripture:

Who among you fears the LORD and obeys his servant?

If you are walking in darkness, without a ray of light,  
trust in the LORD and rely on your God.

But watch out, you who live in your own light  
and warm yourselves by your own fires.

This is the reward you will receive from me:

You will soon fall down in great torment.

Isaiah 50:10-11

O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more.

He will be gracious if you ask for help. He will surely respond to the sound of your cries.

Though the Lord gave you adversity for food and suffering for drink,

he will still be with you to teach you. You will see your teacher with your own eyes.

Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say,

“This is the way you should go,” whether to the right or to the left.

Isaiah 30:19-21

He told us he felt like we had two choices: we could allow God to be our light for our path and follow where He is saying to go, or we could make our own way and it will look like it's a good way, but in the end we would end up with death bed regrets. This is something we talk about often and it was good to hear it from someone else. We HAVE to keep trusting God. We don't know what exactly He is doing, but we most definitely do not want to get to the end of life and wonder “what if we had waited on Him a little longer and trusted Him a little more?” We want to completely trust Him now.

## Sanders Family Unabridged Part 21 (February 2016)

By: Jenny

### Wednesday February 3, 2016

We've had crazy bad weather...for Tennessee. Haha! Church was canceled on Sunday because the roads around it take longer to melt off than other roads in the county. We went to Gateway Church instead, since they were still having their afternoon service. That's where we went last year when Grace Center canceled because of the weather. They are near the end of a 21 day Daniel fast that they were doing as a congregation. The pastor announced that he had a book for each family to take home that was about fasting. I was so excited!! I had been feeling like I needed to do another extended fast. The last time I felt I needed to do that a book about fasting had been given to me and it was happening again!! Yay!! After service one of our friends introduced us to a friend of hers, Kevin, that had just moved here with his wife from Colorado and this was their first service. I said, "Wait, Colorado Kevin?!" Yes, it was! This is the guy that we had heard about. He sold everything he had and moved to Colorado to create a retreat center for people in ministry to come to rest and connect to God away from everything. Aaron had wanted to talk to him ever since he'd heard about him and had wondered how he was going to get to Colorado to meet him. He didn't have to, God brought him to Tennessee! Ha!! He said they were here because they felt like God was calling them to be where the musicians are, but they're not sure what they're going to do. Aaron exchanged email addresses with him so they could stay in contact.

Thankfully we have been in a hotel right now. The weather has been crazy and Jack has been complaining about his ears and throat. We always know when he's not feeling well because he is very quiet. Haha! School was canceled on Monday, so we were able to just sit in the hotel and Jack slept for the majority of the day. He had a fever that started on Sunday and by Tuesday morning was still there and his ears and throat felt worse. There was school that day so we dropped all the other kiddos off and brought Jack to one of the minute clinics. He ended up having strep and an ear infection and wasn't going to be able to be back to school until Thursday. We had only reserved our hotel through Tuesday morning but decided, since Jack wasn't feeling well, that we'd extend the stay through the weekend. It ended up being a good call because school was canceled again on Wednesday and Friday and the bad weather continued all weekend.

I joined a book club! Yay!! I asked two of my other friends to go with me and we went to our first meet and greet on Monday night. None of us had ever been to one and we were completely book nerd excited. We had a wonderful time meeting the other ladies, there are 7 of us in all. We decided that we are going to read C.S Lewis' "Mere Christianity" first.

Aaron had a Facebook message from his friend, Kevin, who lives in China with his family. (Yes, another Kevin in our life! We call this one China Kevin; we're really clever like that) They are in China

to start a farm for the girls that have grown too old to be in the orphanages. They will be teaching them life skills and giving them a place to be safe until they're able to be out on their own. Kevin mentioned that they were in the States visiting family and wondered if Aaron would mind chatting on the phone sometime soon. They've never actually had an opportunity to talk to each other on the phone. They met through Kevin's blog and have always communicated via messages. They had a great time catching up voice to voice and Kevin had some insightful things he shared with Aaron about living out faith. One of them was about listening to your children and letting their voice be yours. They haven't been tainted by the negativity of life yet so more often than not they are closer to God's heart and perspective than we are. He also said that we don't need to worry about what to do next. When it's time for the next step God will place it in front of us. And again we hear, "step into it".

We had friends open their home to us for the weekend again. Their home is one of those places that has a no strings attached feeling of love and welcome. It was wonderful!

Pastor started going back over the Gospel to help people really understand it. Right now the message of Jesus Christ doesn't move people. We've become inoculated to it, but it most definitely moved the first church. What changed? One of the things pastor pointed out was the difference between the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This totally lit Aaron up and caused him to write a blog post about it. Jeff and Becky were at the doors as we left and gave us big hugs and Becky kissed my face. They wanted to know how we were doing and we told them to keep praying! A ladies Bible study had been announced during service and Becky invited me to come to it and told me the church would pay for my registration fee. I had wanted to go when I heard it mentioned anyway and since I ran into her and she invited me again I figured it is probably something I should go to. I'm not sure how I register online and say "the church is paying for my registration" so I'll just go ahead and pay it. haha!! I was invited to a group called "Girls Write Out". It's a group of women that gets together to encourage each other, worship God, and talk about the real life stuff of writing, being signed/published, how to market yourself, etc. The speaker the first night talked about God giving us a vision of what the end of a specific journey is going to look like, but He doesn't give the whole plan on how to get there. He wants us to trust Him for each step. When it's time to step into the next part of the journey, He will place it in front of you. She shared her own story and what it looked like for her to trust God for each step. What is up with all this "next step" coming at us from every direction?! I think God is trying to tell us something! Haha!!

We asked the kiddos, again, how they're feeling about van life. Is it wrong? Are we wrong to be reserving hotels? Are we wrong to be staying with friends? The consensus was that it doesn't feel wrong to be in the van, but it doesn't feel wrong to stay in a hotel or at a friend's house either. It does feel wrong to try to make either of those things happen. If we don't feel a "click" about one of those things, then they're good staying in the van because that feels better than staying in a place that we shouldn't be in, even if it is more physically comfortable.

### **Monday Febraury 8, 2016**

We're out of money until Aaron is paid on the 15th, so we've been in the van for the most part. Not a big deal really because we've done it for so long, but I think we kinda got used to being in beds from staying in hotels. We reminded the kiddos about talking to God about what we need. Thursday morning we checked our Paypal account and had been sent almost \$300 so we stayed in a hotel over the weekend. When I picked Alex up from Pippin rehearsal at the high school that night I told him we were in a hotel and he said, "Thank you, Jesus!!" about a million times. He told me he had prayed that morning asking God if we could be in a hotel because rehearsals are starting to run late now that we're closer to show time and he was going to miss showering for 3 days since the Rec. center is closed by the time he's done. He was excited God answered his prayer to be able to shower!

Aaron took Bella to the daddy/daughter dance at her school. She was absolutely adorable! The theme was "Candyland" and we had gone out hoping to find a good deal on a dress that would look good with that theme. We found a dress for \$7 that had different colored macaroons all over it. So perfect!! God even cares about Bella having a cute dress for her date with her daddy!

We're pretty sure there were bed bugs or flees in the hotel we'd gotten. Aaron had bites all over, at least twenty. So gross!!!

### **Tuesday February 9, 2016**

It snowed for most of the night and when we woke up at 5:00 to start getting ready for the day it was still snowing. We assumed there wouldn't be school but we still hadn't gotten the call that it was canceled. We continued to get ready so we could get Aaron to his bus on time. The call came at 5:20... when we were leaving. Poor Aaron was up for the day since he does not go back to sleep easily once he's awake. We were a little bummed school was canceled because we had to find things to do with the kiddos all day. Since it's so cold and snowy the only options we really have are the library and the Rec. center and there's only so much time one can spend at either of those places. Really, Aaron is the one that ended up having to find ways to keep them occupied. It was my best friend's birthday, so I spent the day out on birthday adventures. She loves the snow (in small doses) so that didn't stop us from venturing out.

### **Wednesday February 10, 2016**

Our tax refund came in this morning so we booked a hotel for the next 2 weeks. We'll see what happens after that. We always hope that God is going to have opened the door to our own home again. One of these days that's what will happen!

### **Wednesday March 2, 2016**

Super behind in writing again. The date is March, but all of what I'm writing about happened in February.

I was still on my fast for our anniversary on the 14th so we didn't go do anything. We don't normally do anything on our anniversary anyway since it's Valentine's Day. It's way too crazy everywhere. Poor

planning on young, lovesick hearts 18 years ago. It sounded sweet and romantic at the time...and we never forget our anniversary...

A big majority of the past couple of weeks has been spent getting ready for Alex' play Pippin. All day on Saturdays for all of us and every evening for Alex and I. It was AMAZING!!! I tell ya, those kids are awesome and Alex did a fantastic job!! He was Pippin's brother, Lewis; an absolutely perfect role for him. Granny and Pop came to see the play and to celebrate Izzy's birthday. She wanted to go to Cracker Barrel for her birthday lunch because she loves the little bottles of syrup they give you. Ha!! How cute is that???

I started the ladies Bible study at church. It's a video series on the "Joy of Intercession" by Beni Johnson. I don't know that I'm necessarily an "intercessor", but the principals on prayer that we have been discussing have been amazing! It's completely changing my prayer life!

I was talking to God one Monday morning about my desire to go to Nashville with the family to walk around, experience the culture down there and help out at some of the ministries for the homeless and low income they have there. My heart really wants to have some kind of ministry here in Williamson County, but I'm not quite certain what it looks like yet, so I want to interact with ones that are already in place because I feel like what is floating around in my head is a mash-up of different things. About 45 min after I had that conversation with God I received a text from a friend asking if I'd like to go with her to People Loving Nashville some Monday night. People Loving Nashville is a ministry that feeds the homeless every Monday night. How awesome is that? Ha! God provided direction right away!

Last Wednesday Aaron and I were heading to the high school a little before 11:00 a.m. for some last minute costume alterations I needed to make. We were talking about doing the things we felt God has placed in our hearts and I told Aaron that I had been feeling like more needs to be done with our family YouTube channel and that I'd like to save money to get an iPad mini or a new phone or something, so that I could video more things that happen. I am forever running out of room on my phone, so I don't post half the things I'd love to on our channel because I don't have space to record anything. Aaron said, "Let's pray about it and see what God wants to do about it." Ugh!!! I hate it when he says stuff like that! Ok, I don't really hate it, but it does get annoying because I just want to do something other than wait! Aaron checked his email after I went inside and at 11:05 a friend from Minnesota had emailed him saying he'd been thinking of us and he thought that we should have a YouTube channel because we have such a compelling story. He said if it was anything we were interested in he could give us information on how to promote our channel and video tips, etc. Aaron emailed back right away telling him about our conversation just minutes before and that we had a YouTube channel but hadn't really done much with it and would love some help. Our friend was excited and sent us some links with information and said when we had gone through those to let him know and he'd help us in whatever way he could. Awesome! It wasn't a new iPad or phone, but it's info. I didn't have on how to better our

content, which is probably more important than new technology in the long run. Another answer right after we ask!

I had a conversation with a friend about the need for a place for people to go to that is safe, entertaining and doesn't cost anything. She has noticed the same thing we have, when there is a government holiday or bad weather the only places available to go that don't cost anything are shut down. Those that have a bad home life or are struggling financially don't have anywhere to go or anything to do. It's not very fun to walk around a mall for hours and not be shopping and it's very uncomfortable to go hang out in a fast food restaurant for hours and only be able to purchase a drink. This is part of my heart for a ministry of sorts. I don't even know if it could be called a ministry. I want to have a place that is open for people to come to to study, read, hang out, play air hockey, ping pong, video games, play music, whatever and just be safe and not have to pay anything. I'd even love to feed whoever is there supper every night or at least on weekends. I have no idea how to get anything like that started or what it actually looks like. Still asking God for direction on that. My friend texted a few days later saying she had come across a verse during her devotion time that made her think of us:

For the LORD grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest. He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.

He guards the paths of the just and protects those who are faithful to him.

Proverbs 2:6-8

## **Sanders Family Unabridged Part 22 (March 2016)**

By: Jenny

### **Friday March 4, 2016**

A friend contacted last night asking for help for a widow friend of hers that needed her washer fixed. Aaron doesn't really know anything about appliances, but we figured you can Google anything, so he said he'd give it a whirl. He jiggled a few wires and got it running in no time. The three of us ladies chatted while he did that and I ended up sharing part of our story. The lady wanted to know what she could do to help us and I assured her that prayer is the best thing ever! Aaron let her know that if she ever needed help with anything else to let us know and we'd be more than happy to help her. He told me later that there was no way anything he did fixed that washer because all he did was jiggle a cord and it wasn't even loose. We'd like to think that God used that situation to introduce us to someone we could help.

### **Saturday March 12, 2016**

We've had a wonderful week of good memories and God moments! I love it when God shows up and you know He sees right where you're at.

Last Saturday I decided we needed to add a little variety to our life and do something we haven't done yet, so we went for a hike around Radnor Lake. I chose a lake because I'm feeling a little homesick for all the lakes and rivers we had up in Minnesota/Wisconsin. I miss water!! I figured the kiddos would love an opportunity to be outside in nice weather doing something new. They were big whiny babies! Well, the boys were, Bella was excited to be out. They got over it eventually, but the whining reached it's peak when it started raining in the middle of the hike. Ha!! The weather was supposed to be nice all day! We didn't get too wet, just enough to make the walk slightly chilly. There were signs everywhere about the different birds one might see on their hike so Bella became an avid bird watcher the whole time. She had a blast! The boys were eventually suckered in by her enthusiasm, which led to the end of their whining. I think she ended up spotting eight different birds. We went to the library afterwards to charge up our phones and they were having a book sale. That thrilled Bella's little heart even further! I had intended on writing, but she was so excited to go look through the books, I took her over there instead. She ended up buying 6 books! She's definitely her momma's girl! We ended the night by going to Culvers. When we had gone up north over the summer a friend had given us a bunch of coupons for free scoops of custard so the kiddos all enjoyed a yummy treat.

I have been thinking a lot about the change I have felt since talking with the pastors at Grace Center and basically put ourselves under their authority. Nobody likes that phrase "under authority" or "submitting", I don't like it either, but there really is something to letting yourself be vulnerable and giving someone the permission, or making room, for them to speak into your life; correction or encouragement. I guess we have never really seen or thought about the blessing that comes from

submitting, because our pastors had almost always been our parents. I don't have an example or anything tangible that has happened since talking with them, it just feels different.

Our new friend texted saying that her washer worked for one cycle and then quit again. She asked if we would mind coming over to take another look at it. Aaron looked at it again, but still not having any knowledge of appliances, couldn't find anything. We YouTubed all sorts of options but none of them worked. Finally, he told her to try resetting it and if that didn't work to let us know and we'd be back on Friday with a voltage meter (after we track someone down who has one) to find where the problem is. She called later that afternoon to let us know that resetting it hadn't worked, so we made plans to go back Friday morning.

I had another book club gathering on Thursday. At our last meeting I had mentioned the fact that I would love to have a taco truck. Only one of the people there had ever had my tacos, so I volunteered to make them for this meeting. I made tacos, refried beans and fideo. It's always sooo delicious, but it is also sooo stinky and because our meetings go until 9:00 or so, I had no access to a shower, and I had to go to sleep smelling like a fried taco. There are worse things I suppose.

I had asked a friend if her husband had a volt meter that Aaron could borrow. She said he did and she also volunteered her husband to go with Aaron to check out the washer since he wasn't working that day. The house they were going to was near her house so I texted that morning asking if I could shower at her house, while the guys were out so I wouldn't have to go to the Rec. center. She said, "Of course!" Yay!! A temperature regulated shower!!! Ha! The guys came back shortly after I was finished and said the motor was shot on the washer and that our friend was going to put an "in search of" add on local garage sale sites. She texted me later that evening and told me that someone had given her a washer for free and would be delivering it next week. Woohoo!!

### **Monday March 28, 2016**

I'm behind in writing again!! Ugh!! Why do I always do that?!!

On Sunday March 13, [Alyn Jones spoke about the kindness of God](#) and how there is a piece of us that doesn't really believe that God is that good. He asked the audience some questions and told us to think about them. How do we live like we believe? how do we live like we expect God's kindness? At the end of his message he invited anyone that felt like they had excitement or hope about what God could do, but didn't see how it would happen, to come forward and he would pray for them. Aaron popped right up! He doesn't normally do that so it took me a moment to comprehend what was going on and then I popped up and followed him. The boys were even slower in comprehension, so they trickled in behind us a few moments later. Pastor Tony came over and prayed with us and then prayed for Aaron specifically. He spoke some things that were spot on to how Aaron had been feeling lately. While he was praying for Aaron a lady came over and prayed with us and then walked away. A few moments later she came back and stood in front of me and took my hand. She had taken a bracelet off

of her wrist and was holding it. She told me she wears it because God has done so many miraculous things in her life and she likes to look at that bracelet to remember that. She said that God told her to give me that bracelet because He is going to do the miraculous in my life. She put the bracelet on my wrist and prayed for me. It is amazing how a person can have a wonderful time in prayer and be spoken to by God and in less than an hour be questioning what was said. Things start to be blown off as generic and “anybody looking at us could come up with something like that to say”. We need to determine to take those thoughts captive and remember the connection our spirit felt when those words were first spoken. There is not a special spirit connection every time we are prayed for, so when that connection does happen we need to take those words and cling to them. Even when the doubts start clouding in, we remember those words connected because they were from our Father, just for us. I met a friend for coffee on the 15th. She said something that has really helped us in interacting with the people in our life. Whenever people have asked us how they can help we have said, “Pray about it and whatever the Lord tell you to do, that’s what you should do.” We further caution them to make sure it’s the Lord and not them trying to “fix” anything for us. My friend told me she thought the last part of that statement throws people off and causes them to second guess whatever is in their heart to do. She said that most people “hear from God” by a feeling that they have, or a thought that just won’t go away, but when we put the disclaimer “make sure it’s the Lord” it makes people unsure of what they’re hearing. She told me that if God wants to send us help through people, He’s big enough to handle it when people help without asking Him first. We don’t need to make it so complicated and cause people to second guess whether they are hearing from God or not. This was great advice and it goes for all situations, not just ours. If someone feels directed to do something to help and it just won’t leave their thoughts or their heart, let them do it. Maybe they need to do it for their walk with God and it actually has nothing to do with you. Do we really think that God isn’t going to do something in our life because someone gave misguided help? I hope not, because I’m pretty sure I’ve been one of the misguided helpers a time or two in my life. Thank you, friend, for speaking so freely and opening our eyes to what we were doing. Love you!!

Aaron, Alex and I went to see Phantom of the Opera at the TPAC (Tennessee Performing Arts Center) with Alex’s theater class on the 17th. We had never seen the whole thing before and we loved it!! We had to add a little flavor to the evening, of course. Aaron drove the bus for the group and dropped us off at the front doors. He had been told by the people at the TPAC that there was special bus parking, and there was, for about 4 buses. He ended up having to park about 5 blocks away. No big deal, we had arrived 30 minutes early, but after all his parking search he only had about 10 min to run back to the TPAC to make it to the show. I had to leave his ticket with the attendant, so I could go in and sit down. I didn’t want to be locked out for the first 12 minutes of the show if he didn’t make it back in time. Ha! Yes, I am very compassionate. He made it back in time! BUT, the kiddos had switched seats around so they could sit next to their favorite people (totally can’t blame them, I’d have done the same) so Aaron and I couldn’t find where our seats were and the lights went down for the show to start. Longish story shorter: we ended up standing in the far back for the first half of the play because there were no

available seats and we didn't want the usher walking up and down the aisle with a flashlight trying to find them for us while everyone else was trying to enjoy the show. We were able to work out the seating arrangements for the second half and enjoyed it sitting down. Aaron was a little put off by it all, but I told him that it is just more adventure to our life so it was all good! That, and we both looked really cute that night. How can things be bad when you're looking good?! Ha!!

We had a great spring break!!! Our original plan was to drive down to Florida to be at the beach for a few days and we were just going to stay in the van. We do that most of the time anyway, so why not do it at the beach!? As much as it sucks sometimes there certainly is a freedom that has come with this crazy life. Not everything has to be perfect, just go out on an adventure!! Live life! Make a memories! Create a story! It turned out that we didn't stay in the van because a precious friend gave us enough money for gas, hotel and food for our trip. How sweet is that?!? We found two jellyfish, saw dolphins playing in the ocean and had the Blue Angels fly right over our heads. Izzy and I brought back half an ocean's worth of shells and Aaron and the boys brought back some serious sunburn. After a few days at the beach we went to Illinois to spend Easter with Aaron's family. He couldn't do anything for the first two days we were there because his feet were so swollen and burned. He had said he wanted to get some sun. I think he's an overachiever. Both of Aaron's grandmas were able to come over on Saturday to have an early Easter meal. Grandma Sanders is doing great! She even went for a ride in ATV around the property, so she could see what's been going on since she's been away.

### **Wednesday March 30, 2016**

After a wonderful time away together and weeks and weeks of feeling hopeful and that God can do anything...I had a HORRIBLE day yesterday. Bleh! Bleh, bleh, bleh. It was a bunch of little things that only happen because we're living in a stupid van that all piled together and broke my brain. I won't list all of them because I know they're stupid little things, but ugh! HOW MUCH LONGER IS GOD GOING TO KEEP SAYING "Wait."????? AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!! <--- Insert cartoon image of me running around crazed and senseless with my hair flying everywhere. I used the only weapon I had: sleep. I couldn't keep my brain focused to think of anything good. Even while listening to music (which normally helps), or reading my Bible, or a devotional (which usually helps) I only had snarky comments popping up in my mind when I'd hear or read certain phrases. Therefore, sleep was a must if I wanted the rest of my family to survive the day. I curled up in the back of the van and slept for about an hour and a half while Aaron went into the library. Because this faith walk is an entire family decision, I asked the kiddos how they were doing when they got home from school. I was hoping at least one of them would be done with it all so we could talk about Aaron getting a corporate job again and just be "normal". I asked each of them, "What would you do right now if you were the daddy or the momma?" This time was a little different than previous talks. Alex thought we should at least explore job opportunities to see if anything opens up because he is sick and tired of the van. He doesn't mind not having a lot of money, he just wants a place to shower, eat, sleep and have friends over. Jack thinks we should explore job opportunities because he wants to have a little bit of extra money to get

nice clothes and do things with friends. He actually doesn't mind the van too much; "the shower thing gets annoying, but other than that it's really not too bad." Max says we need to just keep waiting for God to tell us what to do next. If He is still saying "wait" then we need to keep waiting. He doesn't think the van is that bad either. Bella says we need to wait for God, but she hopes He says something soon because "everybody keeps growing and pretty soon there is not going to be any room at all!" Great. Now what? Our family agreement was that we would all stay in agreement and we're not all in agreement! Aaron and I talked about him contacting his former boss to see if there were any remote positions available. We mentioned this to the kiddos and their first reaction was horror. They thought we meant we were moving back up north. They said "absolutely not!" to that because they love their schools and their friends and they said it "just feels right here." We explained that it would be a remote job and that we weren't trying to make anything happen, but if something opened up we'd probably move forward with it. They were all ok with that, but said if anything did open up they'd want to pray about it as a family to make sure it's what we should do. There ya go. Not the greatest way to end March, but hey, real life, people, real life. I have absolutely no judgment on the children of Israel, anyone else in the Bible or modern times that tries to help hurry along God's promises and plans. He takes a really reeeeeeeally long time. Another C.S. Lewis quote we love to say is from The Chronicles of Narnia where Aslan responds to Lucy's question of "What do you call soon?" and he says, "I call all time soon." Yep, that's God. All time is soon. And for us all time is not soon enough.

## Ready, Set, Summer

May 2016 by Jenny

Here we are at the end of another school year. We made it! Whoop whoop! The kiddos had a fantastic year socially and academically...with the exception of a few missed assignments due to sheer laziness. But we won't dwell on those. If you think my blog posts are long, you should hear my lectures. Ask the kiddos about it and you'll get a lovely exaggerated reenactment of my voice and facial expressions. How did they get so mean and sassy? I can only hope they are all parents some day and I can mock them in return. Anyway...they closed the year out with a bang; attending awards ceremonies, receiving awards, certificates, letters, lots of hugs and words of encouragement for their futures. Lots of running to and fro, with a little bit of clueless wondering mixed in, means Aaron and I couldn't focus our brains enough to form a single coherent sentence, let alone an entire blog post. But, here we are now with our brains functioning as well as any parent's of four offspring could.

All that being said, I have about five different post ideas running through my head and I know Aaron has at least that many. Be prepared!! (Did anyone read that to the tune of Scar's song from Lion King? I totally sang it in my head as I typed it.) I have a one year devotional on the Bible app on my phone that I'm following and I've almost given up on it half a dozen times. Each time I've thought, "I'll read one more to give it another chance." and each of those times, BAM!, it is something that speaks directly to a current thought or conversation that has been had. This time it was a conglomeration of some of the blog posts that have been in my head. For a quicker read than what I normally would have for you, I decided to share part of it. No worries, my loquacious self will still write all the ideas I have in my head later. Consider this a teaser trailer:

### **Put Your Reputation on the Line**

**by Gloria Copeland**

God is a good God. In most circles, that's still shocking news. Do you remember what Jesus told the mad man from Gadara? After He cast out the demons that had possessed him, [Mark 5:19](#) says Jesus told him to tell his friends the great things the Lord had done for him.

Jesus was concerned about God's reputation. He wanted it corrected. Everywhere He went he taught people that God was not what they had thought He was. he taught them that God is a good God. And that's the job He gave us when He left the earth. ([Mark 16:15](#))

[Mark 5:25-34](#) tells of a woman with an issue of blood, who put her reputation on the line. It was against the Jewish Law for a woman with an issue of blood to be seen in public. But she risked public humiliation, even arrest, and fought her way through the crowd to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. Why? Because she was more interested in Jesus' reputation than her own. She knew she couldn't get healed by staying at home doing what the religious community of her day said she should do. To receive her healing, she had to hang on to Jesus' reputation-and let go of hers. She wanted healing so desperately and believed in Jesus' goodness so fully that she was willing to risk it all.

That's how you have to be if you're going to see God work miracles in your life. You have to become so confident about how good He is that you'll dare to lay everything on the line. Choose His reputation over yours every time.

"Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." Mark 5:19

## Waking Sleeping Giants

July 2016 By Aaron

One of the biggest challenges for us, and those who follow our blog, has been the fact that we felt God directing us to not have employment for the first two and a half years of the journey. Jenny addressed this in her [“FAQ”](#) post a few months ago. I wish I could explain why we had to do that, but God does not promise to answer all of our “why” questions, he simply asks us to obey and promises to give us grace and peace as we do so.

Obeying is a concept that Christians are familiar with, but sadly we are not as familiar with God’s character. According to the Bible, he consistently asks his people to do outrageous things. For example, he directed his 12 disciples to go out without provision (after he asked them to leave their employment) in [Luke 9](#) and then directed 72 others to do the same in [Luke 10](#). It does not say if they had families, or what it looked like to walk it out. They just obeyed. This direction was clearly not a rule, rather it appears to be a specific direction, for a specific time ([Luke 22:35](#)). What God has asked our family to do falls into this category, but it was very frustrating because I could not imagine that God would ask someone to do it. This was due to a lack of familiarity with his character, as revealed in the Bible. One thing that I did gain from God directing us to trust him alone for our provision was a desire to seek his character out (mostly because I was mad!). As I saw more of his character, I found that my Christian relationship was with a weak, false, logical, Americanized Christian god and not with the God of the Bible (see post [“The Day We Got a Divorce”](#)).

As I stated earlier, I can not explain why God has directed us to do what he has or why Jesus directed his disciples in Luke to do it, I just know he did. When Jesus directed his disciples to go without provision it was for a specific purpose. They were to go and perform miracles. God did not instruct us to perform miracles, but he definitely gave us a mandate. He specifically asked us to do what I call “wake sleeping giants”. One of the unfortunate results of Americanized Christianity is that it has produced a large group of people who know that they are meant for more but fear, debt, uncertainty and love of comfort keep them from pursuing their passion. They are sleeping giants. Three years ago, when we originally felt the call to wake these sleeping giants, I assumed that waking sleeping giants would look like speaking to churches and church leaders, but that was not the case. I now believe that our journey, itself, is specifically designed to grab these sleeping giants by the lapel and shake them awake. After detailing our story to the family pastor, at a local church, he stated that our story was a “wrecking ball” and it forces people to take God seriously. I pray that is true. People like Francis Chan, Rick Warren and David Platt have obeyed God and written book, after book in an attempt to wake up the sleeping American church. Maybe God has now chosen to use the Sanders family adventure as a “wrecking ball” that will get the job done. We are willing and he is able.

## Red Brick and Black Shutters

October 2016 By Aaron

After two years, nine months and twenty three days, the Sanders family is in a house again! If you have just started following the Sanders family adventures, you can catch up on the last three years [here](#), by scrolling to the bottom and clicking “older posts” until you get to the first post.

Since the beginning of the year we have felt that it was time for a change. As you can see, from previous posts, when we were living out of our van we had peace. We did not love the inconvenience of the situation, but we all knew that it was for a purpose and it was what we needed to do. That started changing at the beginning of the year, but we could not see how our living situation could ever change.

I have mentioned before that we are in the ninth wealthiest county in the country. To say that finding a home is expensive is an understatement. There are few apartments in the area and houses rent for thousands of dollars per month. We felt like God had opened the door for me to drive a school bus but that was not a money making venture, besides it is not the type of job that could take a family from less than a hundred dollars to their name, to spending thousands per month on rent and utilities. Still we all felt an overwhelming sense of hope that restoration was coming. We regularly discussed the frustration of having hope when there was no apparent reason to have hope.

In May we explained the feelings and situation to a couple of ladies from our church and they prayed that we would no longer need to be in our van, and that God would begin to provide a place for us each day. God must have heard that prayer because from that day on we had a place to stay. Sometimes it was in a hotel, sometimes friends offered to allow us to house sit, or just invited us to stay. We are truly blessed with amazing friends and family! We understand that our family adventure is challenging for people. We see from Biblical accounts that [God's Training Plan often involves some peculiar situations](#), but Americanized Christianity has no time for inconvenient and uncomfortable times of testing/training. So we are doubly thankful that God has provided us with so many loving, accepting people who were willing to listen to us, check in on us, and love us as we've walked out what we felt God was asking us to do. This journey has been the most challenging thing we have ever done and there were many days of complete frustration and despair that were brightened by a call from a friend or a note of support from family.

As the school year progressed the feeling of hope got stronger. The pastor at our church was teaching a series on speaking life (Jenny's specialty!) into situations and Jenny was attending a ladies Bible study that was addressing the same topic. During one of the sermons, my mind flashed back to a conversation I had with a friend from China. He was in the states and called to check up on us (see! Awesome friends!). I was explaining to him that my kids were thriving and that they are almost always positive about our adventure. I also explained that I often get frustrated about not being able to provide luxuries

that are part of the American culture. He encouraged me to allow the children's positive words to change how I speak/think about the journey. I was getting the message to remove negativity at every turn.

I began to make an effort to speak faith regarding our adventure and to stop talking/thinking negative things. When I began to focus on my words, I was surprised to discover how negative I was. Then the radiator in our van sprung a leak and needed to be replaced. We had under \$50 to our name and our only source of transportation was out of commission. You try being positive about that!

Jenny calmed me down by speaking faith (she is AMAZING for me) and I took it to a local repair shop. A friend (more amazing people!) allowed me to borrow his vehicle while the repairs were being made. The repair shop called and informed me that the cost to replace the radiator was more than \$600. I told him to go ahead with the repair, not knowing how I would pay for it. Within minutes of authorizing the repairs a fantastic friend (see a pattern here?) contacted and said they wanted to pay for the repair, sighting [Acts 2:44](#) as the basis for their gift. It has truly been humbling and amazing to witness the true church in action over the last 3 years. They do not attend the same church or belong to the same denomination, but they are listening to the Father's voice and for that we are grateful.

So, how did we get a house? At the beginning of October I received a letter from a former employer. 15 years ago they had started a retirement account for me. I vaguely recalled it because I had tried to tap every available resource nearly three years ago [when our adventure got scary](#). At that time the account was not available for withdrawal. I could not even find out how much was in it. Additionally, they did not send statements on the account. As a result, I had forgotten about it. The first letter I had ever received from them stated that the account was available for immediate cash withdrawal and provided the paperwork to make the withdrawal. The account had a substantial amount of money in it. We requested the money and it came a couple of days before Jenny finished a 50 day fast that she felt led to do (coincidence?). That money allowed us to get a beautiful, spacious home near our schools and friends.

We had recently cleaned out our storage units and given our bedroom set away. We also had to throw away a couple of our mattresses, due to water damage, so we needed mattresses. The day before we were scheduled to move into the house a man flagged us down as we were leaving our hotel. We had not stayed in that hotel since last year, so we were sure he could not have recognized us. We stopped and he asked us if we needed mattresses. What? We hesitantly said yes and he explained that he had been hired to remodel the hotel and he had a pile of practically new king size box springs and mattresses left over. He said that he did not want to throw them away, so he thought he would ask us if we wanted them. We gladly accepted! As I was leaving he shook my hand, leaned in and looked me in the eyes. Then he said "remember, God is always good." I asked him what his name was and he said, "Jesus." So, we can legitimately say that Jesus gave us two king size bedroom sets.

In the post "[A Call to Christianity](#)", I stated that I do not record this adventure to convince atheists and unbelievers that there is a God, I record it to encourage Christians to be Christian. An unbeliever or an atheist could use coincidence, or chance to explain away how a phone bill arrives and the next letter opened has a note with a check. The note says "for your phone bill" and the check covers the bill. Or to explain when we feel led to write out a list of our bills and pray for God to pay them and hours later someone contacts us and asks for an itemized list of our bills, because God blessed them and they want to pay our bills. We have [hundreds of little miracles](#) like this in the last 3 years as a testimony to shake the Americanized Christian to the core and wake them up to have a God adventure of their own. When you step out, he will test you, refine you and always provide for you because he is always good.

P.S. Over 2 years ago a friend of ours told us that he felt like God had told him that He was going to give our family a house. Specifically, a house with red brick and black shutters. We had not thought about those words until we had signed the paperwork on the house and were reflecting on the amazing blessing of having a house without striving, stress, government assistance or selling our life away to make monthly payments. It is God's good pleasure to answer prayers... and he is into details, that is why our new house has red brick and black shutters. It is exciting to know that we are exactly where we are supposed to be and we are looking forward to living out the passion that God has placed in us.

## What is Next?

November 2016 by: Aaron

I have been reflecting on the last 4 years of our adventure and am overwhelmed by the things we had to un-learn. So many of the things we thought we understood about who God is and how he behaves had to be re-framed. I now know how Paul could say that he counts all of his former knowledge as rubbish in light of gaining Christ. Paul's dedication to the scriptures was not bad, it was just framed incorrectly. He allowed the truth of the scriptures to be interpreted through the lens of anger and fear. As a result, Paul was willing to kill in the name of the god he served. I do not believe that Paul was saying that his dedication to the scriptures, and his pursuit of God were of no benefit. He was indicating that once he had experienced God, first-hand, he could clearly see how his former knowledge was based on human reasoning, not on Spiritual revelation.

With this in mind, I looked back at my early blog posts. I saw that as I began to realize that my truth was skewed, my writings became very bold in pointing it out. I became a crusader, burdened with what I saw as the responsibility to reveal the skewed truth to everyone that would listen. I often threw tact and diplomacy to the wind in favor of a direct approach. I now see that I was probably pretty annoying...sorry about that. I was seeing the goodness of God like never before and that revelation allowed me to experience more joy, peace and freedom than ever before, yet I chose to share the revelation in a harsh and often degrading way. I truly want to ask for your forgiveness and assure you that it was never my intent to hurt or offend.

We have also learned things over the last four years. Most notably, for me, has been the revelation that you can actually have peace and rest, no matter the circumstances. I have always marveled at the Bible's account of Stephen's stoning. He was not looking forward to the "end of this season" or wishing the pain to pass quickly, he was at rest in the middle of the most horrific situation. In the last eight months of our homeless season I learned to rest and truly be at peace, regardless of the situation. A lesson that Jenny and the kids had learned much earlier in the journey. I firmly believe that God asks his children to do hard things and intentionally puts them in challenging situations, but he does not intend for us to experience the stress and physical strain of those experiences. He offers peace and joy while we are in the training, not just when we make it through.

That is why we are excitedly looking forward to the next part of our journey. We are grateful to be in a house and have enjoyed the comfort of that experience, but we do not feel like we need to rest and recharge our batteries before the next season. As Paul stated in Philippians 4:12, we know what it is to be in need, and we know what it is to have plenty. We have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. In the last week we have gotten some very specific words from God regarding our future and are excitedly looking forward to where God is taking us next. Stay tuned for more detail on that.

As for me, I am going to focus on loving people. I now realize something that had been hidden in plain sight before. That is the fact that perfect love casts out fear. I am called to wake up sleeping giants and fear is the one thing that is currently holding that group back. Fear of leaving their current religion, lifestyle, friends or comforts. As far as I can tell the only way to conquer that kind of fear is with love. That is why I am so grateful for my bus driving job. I can not think of a better group to teach me about unbiased love and abundant forgiveness. It truly is a ministry, not from me to the children, but from the children to me.

