

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
July 22, 2012

Coincidence or Providence?

Read 2 Kings 8:1-6

Key verse: “So the king appointed an official for her, saying, ‘Restore all that was hers, together with all the revenue of the fields from the day that she left the land until now’” (2 Kings 8:6).

“Coincidences are God’s way of remaining anonymous,” someone once said. Certainly we can read too much into coincidences, but there are times when seeming coincidences are clear indications that God is working in our lives.

For example, author Elmer Towns shared this story: “My wife and I went through college by faith. If we had not prayed together daily through all our difficulties, I don’t know how we would have made it. I earned one dollar an hour for driving a school bus, which was just enough to pay for necessities, but there wasn’t even a dime left over for a Coca-Cola.

“One evening the only thing in the kitchen cabinet was a can of tuna, so my wife served a tuna casserole. As we clasped hands to thank God for the food, I prayed, ‘God, you know we are broke. You know it’s two days until payday. You know we are willing to fast until we get money, but we ask you to please take care of our needs.’

“As we finished praying, the laundry man came to the door. Ruth met him to say, ‘No laundry today; we can’t afford to have anything cleaned.’ But he had not come to pick up our cleaning. The laundry man explained, ‘A few months ago your landlord asked me to pass along \$20 to you to pay for having thawed the pipes for him. I had forgotten about it until today.’

“Some might say this was a coincidence, but Ruth and I say that our prayer together reminded the laundry man that he had \$20 for us. He had been sent by God.” (from Towns’ article, “Praying in Tune,” *Pray!* Jan./Feb. 2003).

2 Kings 8:1-6 tells a story of a “divine coincidence” in the life of a woman from Shem. 2 Kings 4 tells how she had opened her home to the prophet Elisha. Wanting to bless her in return, Elisha discovered that she had no children. And he prophesied to her that she would give birth to a son. God did give her a son. But when this child was older, he died suddenly. Elisha came, prayed over the boy, and God brought the boy to life.

2 Kings 8:1-2 tells us that, in the following years, Elisha had warned this woman of a coming famine. The prophet urged her to move her family in order to escape the famine. So, she moved to Philistia and lived there during the seven years of famine in Israel.

This woman then returned to Israel only to discover that someone had taken control of her family's land. The only way to reclaim the land was to appeal her cause to the king. Verses 4-8 tell of the "divine coincidence" that helped this woman recover her land:

"Now the king was talking with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, 'Tell me all the great things that Elisha has done.' While he was telling the king how Elisha had restored a dead person to life, the woman whose son he had restored to life appealed to the king for her house and her land. Gehazi said, 'My lord king, here is the woman, and here is her son whom Elisha restored to life.' When the king questioned the woman, she told him. So the king appointed an official for her, saying, 'Restore all that was hers, together with all the revenue of the fields from the day that she left the land until now.'"

Was it just a coincidence that the woman approached the king just as Elisha's servant was telling the king about God using Elisha to restore her son? Was it just a coincidence or was it providence, evidence of God working through time and circumstance?

Such "divine coincidences" don't occur all the time. But when they do occur, they can be powerful signs to us that God is at work in our lives.

My wife, Vicki, and I had an experience that was very similar to the Towns' answer to prayer. We too were living on a tiny income as I was working my way through seminary. Our three-year-old daughter, Elisabeth, had outgrown her shoes. So, she and Vicki went shopping. They looked and looked, but the only shoes that would fit my daughter's narrow feet cost \$32, and Vicki only had \$17 to spend.

As they got into the car to drive home, Vicki prayed with Elisabeth: "Lord, we thank you that you know that Elisabeth needs new shoes and that you will provide them." When they got home, the mail had arrived. A letter had come from a friend who knew nothing about the shoe problem. This person had never sent us any money, and she never did so again.

But on this day, when Vicki opened the letter, enclosed was a check for \$30. "The Lord put it on my heart to send this to you," said the enclosed letter.

Immediately, Vicki took our daughter back to the mall. They purchased the \$32 shoes, and then bought cookies at the bakery to celebrate God's goodness!

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**“Coincidences are God’s way of remaining anonymous.” And sometimes they are God’s way of assuring us of His great love for us!
(Contact Michael at msigler@fumcfwb.com.)**