

An interview with the National Commander · Heroes of the Faith · Billy Graham on facing the new year

"THE BATTLE IS THE LORD'S" (1 SAM. 17:47)

# WAR CRY

THE SALVATION ARMY

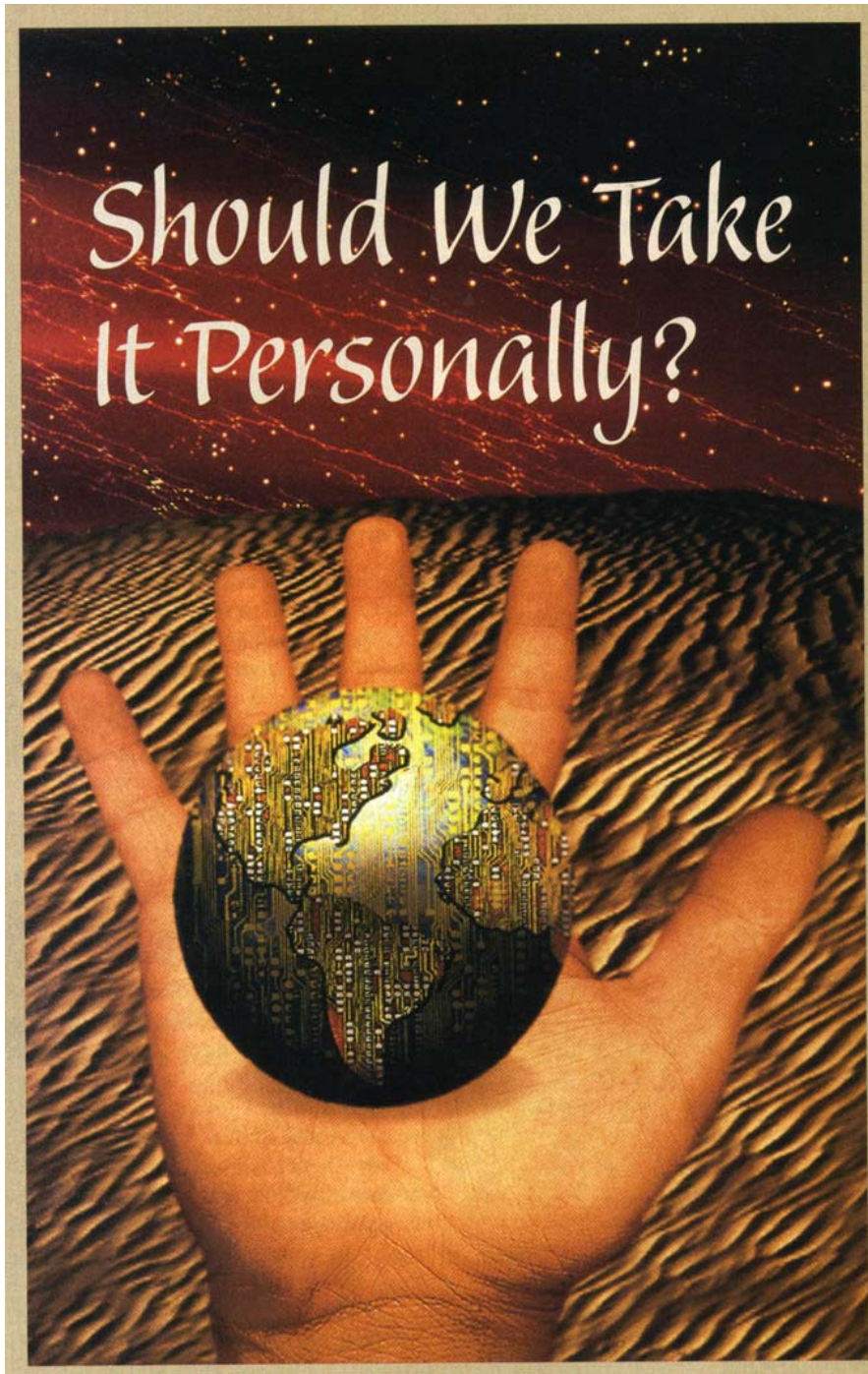
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*You have done many  
things for us, O Lord,  
You have made many  
wonderful plans for us.*

—Psalm 40:5, GNB



# Should We Take It Personally?

Debra M. Coty

**On a humid Sunday afternoon in May of 1992, I found myself wilting under the relentless beating of the Florida summer sun.**

***I need a little air and a change of scenery, I thought as I mounted my bicycle. "A change of attitude wouldn't hurt either!" I muttered under my breath as I began pedaling out of the city and onto the rural road lined by strawberry fields. My already oppressed spirit sank to an all-time low as I glided along, pausing only to wipe sweaty palms on my shorts. My mind drifted back to the last 18 months of disappointment in trying to sell our "starter" house, which we had occupied for 12 years.***

The little stucco residence on the tree-barren sandlot had been fine for Chuck and I during the first five years of our marriage. However, what used to be cozy was now pinching and binding like an outgrown shoe since the arrival of two children, a dog, two cats and a bunny. After five miscarriages, I was more than thrilled to have a house full of life and love, but "full" like a new crayon box is different than "full" like an over-inflated balloon. Lately, we had been feeling a lot like that balloon.

It was a buyer's market and there were houses for sale left and right, and new subdivisions springing up in every abandoned orange grove. We had purchased our home in the country, with cows and pigs and chickens as neighbors, but the city had gradually crept outward and encompassed us, replacing quaint old farms with banks and convenience stores, cars and people.

My regular Sunday bike route took me away from all the noise, out past pristine ponds and grazing horses, to circle around a beautiful rural subdivision with large lots and majestic oak trees. I chose that route because I loved to daydream about living in that wonderful place. It was my fantasy neighborhood, full of birdsong and peaceful shade like the woody area where I had grown up.

A tiny pang of yearning stung my heart as I thought of the hammock we had been given as a wedding gift so many years before. We couldn't get any trees to grow in our sandy yard, so the hammock stayed boxed in the attic collecting spider webs. What I wouldn't give for just one tree to hang it under!

Sometimes I wondered if God really cared about such trivial details in our lives. I had spent countless hours praying for His help in providing adequate living accommodations for our family, but here I was, stuck in the same cracker box year after year. Only six prospective buyers had even looked at the house during the previous year. Just one family, the Garcias,

had seemed interested, but we never heard from them again.

I pumped the pedals furiously, trying to rid myself of pent-up frustration. I began to follow my usual path, when a side road that I had never noticed before caught my eye. On impulse, I braked suddenly and nosed my bike into a secluded cul-de-sac. My heart began to race wildly as my vision was immediately drawn to the blue house in the middle. There were two other well-manicured houses for sale nearby, but this particular house seemed actually to glow in the shimmering heat. I couldn't tear my eyes away from it.

The house was in need of paint and the weeds in the overgrown yard were higher than the shrubbery, but for some unknown reason it drew me like a magnet. It was covered with a canopy of huge spreading oak branches and sat on a large lot bordering an uninhabited wooded area.

I bicycled repeatedly around the turn-about, unable to pull my eyes away from the blue house, or to understand why my heart was pounding so. Then I heard an unmistakable inner voice say, "This is the one. Your wait is over!"

Could it be? Could God truly be answering my prayers in this extremely personal manner?

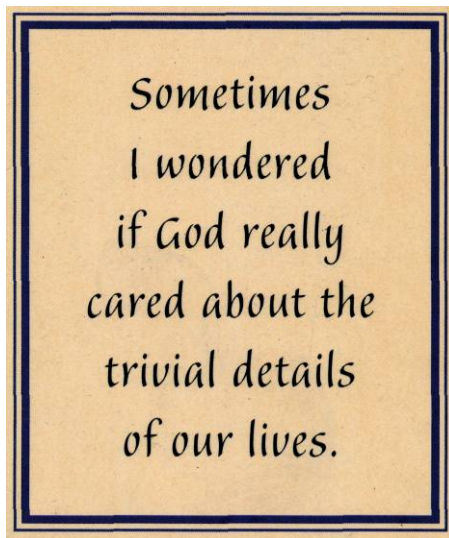
I raced back home and breathlessly told my dubious husband the whole story. He too had been a believer in the power of God for many years, but since suffering through our heart-wrenching miscarriages, we had both become somewhat skeptical of God's sovereign intervention on a personal level.

We learned that the house had been for sale for 18 months and the contract had just expired with the current realty company. The owners were divorced and it had been unoccupied for over a year, although an indoor cleaning service made regular visits. We were able to set up an appointment to meet the owner and see the house the next day.

My highest expectations were sur-

passed in every way, but there was one enormous obstacle blocking this achievement of my heart's desire—after being previously reduced twice, the asking price still exceeded our top range by \$40,000. It might as well have been a million. When I heard the final price, I couldn't stop tears from flooding my eyes.

"I can't believe God would bring us this far to have it end like this," Chuck said softly. With quiet resolve, he turned to the owner of the house and asked her to sit down at the kitchen table. With my heart in my throat, I listened as he calmly offered



her a seemingly ridiculous price within our affordable range. He went on to explain how we had asked God for a house, and He had led us to this one. We wished we had more money to offer, but this was all we could afford to pay.

I held my breath as she considered his words for what seemed an eternity.

"Well, I guess if God wants you to have this house, I won't stand in His way," she said, as I felt my clenched hands go limp and fresh air rush back into my burning lungs.

Stepping out on faith, we put a contract on the house with a contingency that we sell our little house within three months. We prayed in earnest that a buyer would miraculously appear. One month passed, then two. Only one family looked at

the house, even after we reduced the price (again). It was beginning to look hopeless.

Then one afternoon, as I was on my knees, reading the Bible and praying, I came across Psalm 37:3-5. I knew right away that it was a personal message just for me. "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this."

As I read the passage aloud, I felt a peace wash over me and I was able to relax for the first time in many weeks. Maybe, just maybe, He was a personal God after all.

The next day, the doorbell rang. There stood the Garcias. They explained that they had liked our little house the first time they looked at it, but had decided to build a new house instead. They had put all their money down, and then waited and waited. One thing after another went wrong, and their new home never got past the foundation. Yet they never forgot our little house. After many months of frustration, they finally demanded their money back from the builder and here they were, asking to see our house again.

My family (pets and all) huddled nervously in the corner. Nothing moved except our eyes as we watched the Garcias walk through the rooms, inspecting every little crevice. At last they reappeared after a whispered conversation in the backyard, and made us an offer. We were able to agree on a fair price and signed the contract that very day.

Our path was not exactly strewn with rose petals afterward—the Garcias had difficulty obtaining approval for their loan, and the closing was delayed time and time again—but now, as I watch from my backyard hammock as the magnificent pileated woodpeckers root for their dinner in the ancient oaks, I have a concrete reminder that God is indeed a very personal God.