

September 30, 2010

Dear Friends,

Part of why you haven't heard from me lately is that I took the first ten days of September to spend time in the mountains of New Mexico for an archery elk hunt. It was an amazing eight days in the woods with a good friend for the first four and then just with God for the rest. I came home physically exhausted but emotionally and spiritually renewed. For those of you concerned about the poor elk, don't worry. I came home without an one this year, but I had several amazing encounters with what for me is one of the most exciting animals in God's creation as well as a couple encounters with bears. Here's a picture of a bear that will come back into the story later on.



The time away provided me with a much-needed break from crisis management. It also afforded me some incredibly valuable time with the Father whom I had sensed calling me to "Gracie's Wallow" for several months. In June, I learned I had drawn a coveted elk tag in an area close to where we lived when our daughter was born. Morning after morning, I looked up on the wall of our bedroom to see a picture I took of her when she was just a little over a year old. (She turns 13 in a couple weeks). In the picture, she is in a bonnet playing with oak leaves about 100 yards from a wallow I had discovered that day with her in a backpack carrier. Now for those of you who have no idea what a "wallow" is, it is a place in a mountain where water accumulates in which the animals drink, play and roll in the mud.

Every morning when I looked at that picture, I had a sense the Father was calling me there. My friend and I camped over an hour away from Gracie's Wallow initially but I kept hearing His call. Finally, after he left, I moved camp and made my first trip in. My GPS told me it was 1.37 miles from the road to the wallow and the first afternoon, I didn't make it all the way because I had too much fun calling back and forth with a couple bugling (that's the vocal noise elk make) bulls. I called one in to about 15 yards and another to less than fifty. I didn't get a good look at the second bull, though I thought from his bugles he was larger so I let the first one walk.

The second day, I had one of, if not the most exciting evenings I have ever had in the woods. I worked a large bull for almost two hours and got as close as 18 yards on a couple occasions but the brush was too thick for an ethical shot. When I finally ran out of daylight, I started heading back to my buddy's 4wheeler only to have the bull follow me bugling for about half the way out. I just laughed and thanked God for an incredible evening.

The next afternoon, I knew Abba was calling me back so I headed out again about 2PM. I was only about ¼ mile in when I heard an unmistakable noise. I had come within six inches of stepping on a four-foot rattlesnake that instantly coiled up and gave off its menacing rattle. I jumped about six feet to the side while simultaneously moving my bow down to help guard my ankles. Thankfully, it was just a warning rattle and he was almost as happy for me to leave as I was to get out there.

When I made it to the wallow, I had a strong sense God wanted me to sit silently. Now, you must understand, when it comes to elk hunting, I'm a caller. (I use a variety of sounds to simulate both bulls and cows.) I love to get the elk talking and I have had tremendous success this way. So when God asked me to sit silently, it was quite a struggle, especially when I heard the first bugle about 200 yards up the canyon. I argued with Him some, but I

truly wanted to encounter Him more than I wanted the bull so I remained silent and had a long conversation with the Father. He spoke many powerful things to my heart and reminded me of a name he has spoken to me before. When I asked him “Who am I to you?” I immediately heard “You are my Aragorn.” As I pursued the question, he reminded me how Aragorn (From the Lord of the Rings) was constantly leading others into impossible battles against seemingly unconquerable foes. I struggled to accept what he was showing me, but He continued and spoke a number of other related things as well that I don’t have the space or possibly the boldness to share. About every fifteen minutes during our conversation, the bull would bugle from up the canyon as if he was trying to entice me to call back or chase after him. In obedience, I stayed put and kept silent. Finally, just as light was running out, I started packing up my gear for the hike out when I sensed the Father telling me to wait. I argued with him again, “Why would I wait, its past legal shooting time. You surely wouldn’t want me to break the law would you?” But I sensed it even stronger . . . “Wait!” As I sat back down, I heard the sound of something coming through the brush above me.

I expected to see a massive bull elk in the waning light and part of me thought “God, that’s not nice.” But then to my surprise a large black bear appeared about ten yards away sauntering down to the water. (The picture earlier is the same bear but taken a couple days later. If I had left when I wanted to, I likely would have met him halfway to the wallow.) I sat back and watched him as he drank and played in the water and then cringed as he started heading right down my exit path. I prayed, “Lord, please let him catch my wind, turn and go up the ridge so I don’t have to worry about him.” Well, he wandered down about twenty yards below me, stopped, stuck his nose up in the air and began sniffing. He then looked right at me, gave out a “woof” and trotted up the hill to the East. I uttered a very emphatic, “Thank You, Lord.”

I wish I could say the excitement was over for the evening, but the worst was yet to come. By this time, it is pitch dark with no moon. No big deal as my kids had given me a very bright new LED headlamp for Christmas, and I had just replaced the batteries before heading out that afternoon. Well, I made it about 100 yards when it just suddenly died. I took it off, hit it a time or two and it came back on. However, as soon as I started walking, it went off again. I could get it to work for about thirty seconds and then it would die. Again I thought, “No big deal, I’ve got another one in my backpack.” However, as soon as I started moving the zipper, a dim light came out of the pocket. Somehow it had gotten turned on in my pack earlier in the day and it was very, very dim. I was over a mile away from the road, more than a little spooked by the rattlesnake, the bear and a detail I hadn’t mentioned yet: a friend of mine had an encounter with a mountain lion at this same wallow a few years earlier.

I took a few deep breaths and asked the Father what to do. Then I strapped my bow onto my backpack to free up my hands, slapped my new headlamp a couple times and got it working again. I put my dim light in my left hand for the dozen or more times the other one would go out and I carried an arrow in my right hand for “protection” from the lion I figured was next on the agenda. As I started walking again, I laughed at myself and said out loud, “God, I know I’m in a battle and there may be more trouble before I get back to camp, but I’m trusting you are my protector and will give me whatever I need.” I felt better, but still leery of what was next.

Well, about an hour later, I finally made it back to the 4wheeler. The first two nights, I had made the trip out in about 30 minutes. Somehow, this night, I got completely turned around, ended up climbing a steep ridge in the wrong direction and had to fight my way through a quarter mile of thick brush. Needless to say, when I finally hit the road I breathed a huge sigh of relief. Getting back to camp was almost like coming home.

That was three weeks ago and now I’m back in Kansas. The battle still rages, though I haven’t heard any rattlesnakes going off lately. I’m trying to hold on to the things God spoke to my heart and trying to learn to hear His voice and walk with Him in the day-to-day struggle of life and ministry. Honestly, it was easier and less confusing on the mountain: I knew the snake was bad news, and I could visibly see the bear. Many things here are not so black and white but many shades of gray. I know God has called me to lead others in this seemingly impossible battle in very similar ways that Aragorn led the charges at Helms Deep and at Sauron’s gate on the edge of Mordor. I see the enemy’s mighty army in front and casualties all around me. Yet, in the midst of the chaos, I believe God is doing something amazing. I believe he is guiding me and others through the carnage. Since coming back, I’ve met with several new individuals who are just beginning the fight, just joining our recovery groups. I’ve seen glimpses of God’s deliverance and clear evidence of Satan’s devastation.

One of the battles where I constantly see both God and Satan at work is our finances. The past three months we have been right on the edge. Each month I thought we wouldn’t have enough to pay rent and salary. Yet like manna from heaven, checks have come in the mail literally on the last possible day. One first time donor sent a significant check with a box of materials she was returning. She wasn’t returning them because she didn’t want

the materials but because we accidentally sent her order twice. ☺ Several of you are receiving our newsletter for the very first time because you responded to God's call to send a donation that was exactly what we needed. God's faithfulness is amazing. (In fact, I'm counting on it today, as we are once again right on the cusp of being able to pay the October 1<sup>st</sup> bills.) The enemy, however, is constantly at work attempting to intimidate, discourage and convince us all is lost. In my sane moments, I laugh to myself like I did walking out in the dark knowing God is our protector and our provider. In my not so sane moments, I tremble. I wonder what in the world I am doing and how is this not going to turn out badly? So please pray for us to remember our Father has our back covered and will see us through. Please also prayerfully consider your financial support of our ministry. There are still many things we long to do. No, funding is not the answer, but it certainly helps.

Please continue also to pray for my writing. I'm in the final stages of working with the editor from Leadership to fine tune an article for pastors that is scheduled for publication in January. It wouldn't surprise me for the snake to try to pull the rug out from under it, so please pray it will move forward and that it will be an opportunity for pastors to look honestly at their own struggles. The chapter I wrote for the Covenant Eyes' E-book for pastors is also out of my hands now and should be released in the next few months.

I also feel led to write out my "Gracie's Wallow" story. There are many, many details I've left out of this letter and I think there is a chance to have it published in a hunting magazine. I might even be able to sneak in a reference to our ministry in a secular publication geared towards men. Who knows what God might do with that?

Here at New Hope, we are halfway through the second round of "Belonging" and it is going extremely well. Here is a quote from a note one of the participants sent this week: "Belonging is tailor made for me and for the situation I have with my grandson who lives with me. The information is helping me to understand him (Relational circuits, attachment pain, etc.) so much more, and helping me to be much more patient with both of us! I feel like I am coming to Lawrence to attend the class and coming home to 'laboratory' time! It has actually been fun trying things I've learned and watching his responses. I am encouraged for the first time in a long time!"

Please pray for us as we finish the final six weeks and as we make decisions about what to do in 2011. Right now, I am thinking about doing Restarting again, only with me teaching the material over twenty weeks rather than watching the videos in twelve. This approach will allow us to spend more time on some of the content, do more Immanuel prayer and right brain training exercises as well as incorporate some of the incredibly valuable information from Belonging. Please pray about joining us.

Finally for those of you in the Lawrence area, please consider joining us on Sunday mornings. If you are not connected to a local church body that cares for your heart please know we would love for you to join us. Many have found having continuity in what they are learning in recovery and what they are hearing on Sundays to be very valuable. I have just begun a new series on the book of Acts and the Romans series I just completed should be available on-line in its entirety in the next couple weeks.

As always, thank you again for your generous support of our ministry. Your prayers, gifts and encouragement mean more than you can imagine. I wish I had the time and words to convey what it means to my heart every time I open the mail and see your generous and sacrificial giving to us and this unique ministry to which God has called us.

Because of the resurrection,



Darrell Brazell

PS If you find anything out of wack with this newsletter or the delivery of it, it is probably because Tonya Dodd, who handles a number of administrative things for me, including the newsletters, is out on "Maternity Leave" right now. Praise God she delivered a healthy baby girl, Claire Marie on August 30<sup>th</sup> and the whole family is doing well and enjoying her arrival.