

DIVINE INTERVENTIONS

(Based on missionary experiences of the Brosnan family)

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(serving in southern Africa under Baptist World Mission since 1992)

The purpose of this story is to reinforce and illustrate the truth that God's servants can trust the Lord explicitly for direction and protection in their lives and ministries. The story is a stitching together of some of the most overt, divine interventions in our lives and ministry as missionaries. This four-part story is well suited as a missionary supplement to a four-week or four-day children's program. Each segment is also a suitable length as a bed-time story or as part of family devotions.

The accounts of the lost wallet, ministry in India, and "angel" in the airport are related just as they occurred. The account of the "phone call from God" is also true, but the setting and some details were changed because of the sensitive nature of that event. I have used the names Keith and Laura Brennan rather than Kevin and Tamara Brosnan. Other names have also been changed with the exception of Drs. Chelli and Ironside.

OVERVIEW OF SEGMENTS:

- **SEGMENT ONE – The Big Decision.** Young people need to know that the God of yesterday is also the God of today. Our generation needs to exercise the same faith as our spiritual forefathers. The decision to follow the Lord's leading into missionary service is also a decision to trust God with our lives.
- **SEGMENT TWO – The Day I held up a 747.** God uses his servants in spite of their mistakes and weaknesses. He often glorifies Himself most through our weaknesses. God's provision in smaller things helps build our faith for the greater trials.
- **SEGMENT THREE – Angel in the Airport.** Nothing takes the Lord by surprise. He is aware of our needs even when we are not. God's servants need to learn to trust God, even with their physical lives. There are times when God may overtly intervene to preserve or protect His servants.
- **SEGMENT FOUR – Phone Call from God.** This segment illustrates Psalm 91. The Lord's glory is more important than personal justice and He is able to protect and preserve His servants. The Lord can use a godly response and attitude, not only to derail Satan's plans, but even to restore ungodly men to Himself.

SEGMENT ONE – THE BIG DECISION

"You can trust God. No matter where He sends you, no matter what happens, you can trust Him with your life. He will take care of you. If you trust Him he will *prove* Himself over and over again." The grey-haired missionary spoke with such conviction that the young man in the congregation knew the missionary must have experienced God's protection and power many

times during his ministry in Asia. “But, will God do the same for me in Africa?” the college student pondered. It was a time of soul-searching for Keith Brennan, the would-be missionary from Indiana, who was in the midst of his freshmen year in Bible College. “Yes, I will claim God’s promises. Although there is fear and uncertainty in my heart, I know I must trust and obey the Lord.” On that day Keith surrendered his life and will to follow God’s leading to Africa. He resolved that the God of the old missionary is also the God of the young missionary.

Although only a few years ago, that decision now seemed a distant memory to Keith as he and his wife, Laura, both twenty-seven, prepared to board a 747 jumbo jet bound for India. That’s right – India. Keith agreed to teach for one term in the Bible college there before returning to America to begin deputation for Africa. Keith and Laura believed their short-term experiences in India would help prepare them for their ministry in Africa. But, God had a more singular purpose in mind, something they could never have anticipated. Before their return to America, the Lord would brand upon their hearts the conviction that they can explicitly trust Him with their very lives.

Oblivious to the impending trial, Keith and Laura’s hearts were full of excitement as they watched the continental United States recede into the eastern horizon. Before them lay the great expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Their wearisome journey would take them from Chicago to Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Singapore, Bombay, and finally, Bangalore, India. Having slept little over the past couple days and with their body clocks still on American time, Keith and Laura felt like zombies as they walked through the Singapore airport to make their Bombay connection. What a relief to finally settle into their seats on the Singapore Airline 747. As the last person boarded and the stewardess sealed the door, Keith and Laura sank into their seats for a desperately needed sleep.

Before Keith could fall asleep, an eerie, uneasy, fearful feeling struck him, sending a bolt of adrenaline through his body and jolting him into a state of full attentiveness. “Something is not right. What is it?” he silently questioned himself. It was then he realized that his back pocket was empty. Where was his wallet? He quickly pulled their luggage out of the overhead compartment and searched everywhere. His wallet was gone! Their money, their traveler’s checks, their credit card, their contact numbers, all gone. At that moment a painful, sinking feeling gripped his being as he contemplated their arrival in Bombay.

Keith motioned to the stewardess and informed her that his wallet was missing. “Where did you last have it?” she asked. After some desperate concentration he remembered exchanging some money in the airport. “Perhaps I left it on the exchange table in the airport,” he suggested. “Which one?” she replied. “All I know is that it was on the other end of the terminal,” Keith answered. An array of emotions began buffeting him as the stewardess walked away. First, were the thoughts of denial. “Perhaps I am dreaming. Or, maybe I have overlooked my wallet. No, it is really gone!” Denial was followed by self-incrimination. “How could I be so stupid and inattentive? How could I allow this to happen to me?” Then, the thoughts of consequences. “What will I do when I reach Bombay? Who can possibly help me there? Is there any solution for this problem?” Then, the thoughts of humiliation. “I must look so foolish to my wife. Surely, everyone back home will laugh and shake their heads. They will all say I am too young and immature for missionary work. Perhaps they are right.” For the first time in his life, Keith faced a major problem of his own making with any potential solution being totally out of his hands. Laura was strangely silent and Keith’s mental torment was unbearable.

SEGMENT TWO – THE DAY I HELD UP A 747

Keith's inner turmoil was compounded by the lack of outward activity in the airplane. To Keith it seemed the aircraft and all its occupants were frozen in time. In reality a mere twenty minutes had expired before the cabin crew re-opened the door. A Singaporean police officer entered, holding a wallet in his hand. "Is this yours?" the officer inquired. "It can't be. It simply can't be," Keith thought, as he began to examine his wallet. Astounded and in a state of disbelief, Keith found the wallet just as he left it. Nothing was missing. The sensation of holding once again in his hand that which he had lost all hope of recovering, was to him as miraculous as fetching a coin from a fish's mouth.

In an instant the pendulum had swung from gloom and dismay to comfort and relief. But, Keith's embarrassment was destined to have its climax. The policeman had no sooner left and the door sealed than the captain made this announcement. "We apologize for the delay. We will try to make up time during our flight, but we will arrive late in Bombay. One of our passengers misplaced his wallet in the terminal so we were delayed while airport security made a search of the airport. We are happy to announce that the wallet was recovered." Keith felt as if everyone in the aircraft was staring at him. But, he had to admit that he deserved whatever humiliation, perceived or real, that might come his way. Keith resolved that in the future he would do his best to make it easier for the Lord to take care of him and Laura. What he didn't realize was that there would be times when dire circumstances would befall them over which they could have no control. Keith's last thought before drifting off into a deep sleep was, "It is true that God will take care of me, even when I make it hard for Him."

The weeks in Bangalore flew by as Keith and Laura poured their lives into the college ministry. Keith loved his first opportunity to teach men destined for the ministry. His course load was demanding, but fulfilling as he taught Greek, Hebrew, and the biblical book of Isaiah. Keith and Laura learned to be flexible, adaptable, and patient, all qualities they would later need in large doses for their ministry in Africa. They also prized their interactions with the respected and seasoned men who administrated the college. Dr. Jacob Chelli, the college president and a native Indian, was a man of great vision and faith. Dr. Alan Ironside, nephew to the famous expositor, was a Canadian missionary with many years of experience in India. His love for the Lord and God's work seemed to glow from his face. Despite innumerable hardships he had never lost his zeal and enthusiasm for the Lord's work.

After weeks of primarily academic work, Keith was excited at the prospect of traveling with Drs. Chelli and Ironside on a preaching itinerary for two weeks following graduation. They would have the opportunity to survey the ministries of several graduates of the college and to see a wider spectrum of Indian society and lifestyle. However, two seemingly unrelated yet providential events occurred just days before the graduation, both of which would alter their plans and converge into a spectacular demonstration of God's sovereign care for the young missionary couple.

First, Laura observed what appeared to be an insect bite on her lower left leg. The other event was larger in scope. The drought which had persisted during their time in India was forcing electrical outages every night in southern India, which depends on hydroelectric power. Keith and Laura had grown accustomed to the erratic water and electrical supply, but Keith never anticipated that the drought would impact his planned preaching itinerary with Drs. Chelli and Ironside. Just days before graduation the college president informed Keith that the trip was

cancelled. It was simply impossible to hold open air meetings at night with no electricity. Keith tried to conceal his deep disappointment. From his perspective, an unfortunate circumstance was robbing him of the opportunity of a life-time. He simply needed to accept by faith that God knew what He was doing. Keith could not have possibly anticipated that the Lord was using this untoward circumstance to save Laura's life!

SEGMENT THREE – ANGEL IN THE AIRPORT

“It’s just a nasty boil. Use this ointment and it should clear up in a few days.” The sore on Laura’s leg had grown and become more sensitive, but with these words, the well-meaning, Indian doctor set Keith and Laura’s minds at ease. The original plan was for Laura to stay in the missionary apartment in Bangalore while Keith and Drs. Chelli and Ironside conducted the two-week preaching tour. What would have been the highlight of Keith’s missionary experiences in India turned out to be a great disappointment as the entire trip had to be cancelled.

Laura, sensing that all was not well, was secretly relieved to know her husband would not be leaving her. That afternoon, while Keith and Laura paused at a gate to converse with another missionary, Laura fainted. The consensus of opinion was that Laura had succumbed to the heat of the day, but Keith, knowing the vigor and strength of his young wife, was becoming increasingly concerned.

With the preaching tour cancelled and the graduation completed, the college president advised Keith that he might as well try to change the dates of his return tickets. Keith was able to confirm all flights except the Bombay to Singapore leg. Laura obtained a doctor’s note with the idea that it might help them secure seats for the unconfirmed segment of their journey. The next day Keith and Laura said their parting “good-byes” and headed for the airport in Bangalore, not knowing whether they would be stuck in Bombay.

Sad news awaited the couple in Bombay. The flight to Singapore was fully booked and wait-listed. It appeared they would spend at least one day in Bombay. However, to their surprise the doctor’s note bumped them to the top of the wait-list. They were called to the counter at the last moment and given the last two seats which were opened up by two passengers who hadn’t arrived for the flight. Singapore Airlines further assisted them by moving them to seats by an exit door where Laura could elevate her leg. Laura didn’t tell Keith how much her leg was hurting or how dizzy she felt. She prayed for strength to endure the flights until they reached Los Angeles.

Keith slept but Laura couldn’t. She had never felt so sick in her life. She felt as if she was going to die. Laura turned to prayer and the Scriptures for strength. Her devotions for that day took her to Psalm 118, where she read in verse seventeen, “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.” She claimed verse seventeen as God’s promise to her. With this new found peace in her heart, she drifted off to sleep.

Hours later the Brennans found themselves once again in the Singapore airport. Apart from Keith’s embarrassing memory, the couple enjoyed the beauty and cleanliness of the world-class airport. Keith left Laura at McDonalds while he went off to exchange some money. His kind wife did not so much as utter an admonition or joke about his wallet. This time Keith guarded his wallet with paranoid vigilance.

“You must go to the clinic immediately,” insisted the young woman. “Do not board your flight to Los Angeles. Go to the clinic now!” pleaded the stranger. The lady had approached Laura at McDonalds while Keith was exchanging money. When Keith returned the young lady implored him to take Laura to the airport clinic immediately. She gave directions and pointed them in the right way. After securing their assurance that they would go, she walked out of their lives as quickly as she entered them. “Who was that woman and why is she so concerned about you?” Keith enquired of Laura. “I don’t know her name. She just approached me while you were gone exchanging money,” Laura replied.

While they preferred to seek medical assistance in Los Angeles, they decided to take the stranger’s advice, even if it meant missing their flight. “One more day and you would have lost your leg or your life” was the doctor’s assessment after a five-minute examination. She continued, “You have an advanced case of cellulitis. You would certainly have died in Bangalore without prompt and proper medical attention. I would hospitalize you here in Singapore, but since you are headed to Los Angeles, I will administer a massive dose of antibiotic and send you on to the airport clinic in L. A., where they will re-assess your leg. You will need to spend several days in the hospital in Los Angeles. Stay off your leg and get lots of rest. Take this note. They will be expecting you.”

“That doctor in Singapore saved your life,” declared the physician in L.A. “She was on the ball and gave you exactly what you needed for your particular case. If I were you, I would write her a note of thanks. But, I can’t understand your leg. The cellulitis is almost completely gone. These cases normally require several days of hospitalization, but in light of your much improved condition, I will give you a course of antibiotic and advise you to see a doctor in a week.” Keith and Laura spent the next few days driving along the California coast, visiting Disney Land, and praising God not only for meeting their need, but for proving to them that they can trust Him with their very lives.

SEGMENT FOUR – PHONE CALL FROM GOD

Years past, but Keith and Laura never forgot to take refuge in the Lord and to trust Him explicitly with the issues of life. There were many victories and blessings, souls saved and lives changed. And, the Brennans enjoyed serving the Lord on the “front lines” as missionaries in South Africa. But, with every step of progress it seemed that Satan worked harder to attack them. Like the days of Job, Keith felt as if he could hear the “accuser of the brethren” seeking permission to afflict him. “Can I discourage them? Can I cast a wedge into their marriage? Can I harm their children? Can I spread lies about them?” The Brennans had never experienced such oppressive spiritual battle. It was as if Satan had “taken off the gloves.”

“Watch your backside,” another missionary warned. But, Keith was already aware that Dingeeza (Din-gee-za), one of the national pastors, had evil intentions and seemed to be patiently working by some craftily-devised master plan to remove him from his position as principal of the Bible institute. What Keith didn’t realize was that this man’s goal was to force Keith’s resignation from all ministry by disgracing him to his mission board. Keith knew what Dingeeza knew – that the other national pastors would view any response on Keith’s part as self-serving. Such action would play right into the carefully laid trap of his enemy and inevitably result in the breakup of the Bible institute and division among the young national churches.

Keith decided he would not allow personal concerns to jeopardize the ministry in South Africa. He watched in dismay as the wolf in sheep’s clothing continued to sow his divisive seeds among the unsuspecting national pastors. Keith wondered how they could so easily accept gossip against the one who had poured his life into them. Keith knew that Dingeeza would ultimately bring his plan to a climax and he prayed often that the Lord would protect His churches, their pastors, and the Bible institute in that day. He also prayed for strength and wisdom to respond properly regardless of the consequences.

The stage was set. All Dingeeza needed was some pretext of gross misconduct. Finally, it happened. The institute bookkeeper had improperly recorded numerous financial transactions. Dingeeza knew that sorting out the paper trail would be confusing and time-consuming, so he seized upon the opportunity to lay charges of embezzlement against Keith. Dingeeza worked the phones feverishly, alleging that Keith had used institute funds for personal expenses. His arguments were so convincing! He persuaded the board members to immediately discharge Keith, inform his mission board, and suggest that they recall and dismiss him from missionary service altogether.

Dingeeza’s plan worked better than he anticipated! He even persuaded Ballezi (Bal-lee-zee), the one person with the power and influence to thwart his plan. Keith phoned Ballezi, but to no avail. Ballezi politely told him that he must put the Word of God above his personal relationship with Keith. Like Haman’s noose, only one day and a board meeting was all that stood between the Brennans and the end of their ministry in South Africa.

News of Ballezi’s capitulation fell like a dagger upon Keith’s heart. He remembered the day he led Ballezi to Christ, the many hours he spent discipling him, and all the teaching and assistance

he gave to help Ballezi complete his Bible institute training and start a new church. Keith wondered if Ballezi remembered the message he preached at his ordination. While Laura kept offering words of encouragement and hope, Keith knew the reality of the situation. His ministry would end tomorrow. The pain was deeper than he anticipated. Bitterness and animosity were knocking at the door. Keith knew he and Laura would need much prayer and grace, especially for the events of the following day.

Keith and Laura stood in their bedroom, embracing. They were beyond words. Their eyes alone communicated to one another the myriad of painful emotions buffeting their souls. Their four children were completely unaware of their parent's anguish. Their infant daughter crawled innocently around the room while her parents fell on their knees at the foot of their bed, pouring their hearts out to the Lord. Keith and Laura were much encouraged by a long season of prayer. They took refuge in the God Who had seen them through many other trials. They reminded themselves that what God knows to be true is far more important than what men think to be true.

"It was a phone call from God," Ballezi's wife exclaimed! "When I answered the phone and realized what had happened, I just knew it was a phone call from God." Keith couldn't believe his ears as he listened to Sharetha's story. "The phone rang this afternoon, but no one spoke when I answered it. At first I only heard the babbling of a baby. I was about to hang up when I discerned familiar voices in the background. It was you and Laura. I realized that your daughter must have taken the phone off the hook and pressed the redial button. I could tell you were praying and I didn't think it was right for me to listen. Then, I concluded that it was surely a phone call from God and that He wanted me to listen. I listened for a long time. Now, I know what is in your hearts and what an evil thing Dingeeza has done."

At this point Ballezi took the phone. "Sleep easy tonight, brother Keith. I have already made several phone calls. We will have a meeting tomorrow night as planned. But, it will not be you, but Dingeeza, who will have much to answer for. I have already sorted out the bookkeeper's errors and documented Dingeeza's subtlety. He will swallow his own poison. We will not allow him to divide our churches or destroy our Bible institute. Please forgive me for accepting one side of the story."

That night God burdened Keith for Dingeeza. "He is a brother in the Lord who allowed himself to be filled with pride and ambition," Keith thought. "He has God's call upon his life and the gifts for a fruitful ministry. Yet, he will never stand behind the pulpit again after tomorrow night's meeting. Oh God, is there anything I can do to salvage him for your work?" The next morning Keith phoned Dingeeza to request an urgent private meeting. Dingeeza, hopeful to obtain some new ammunition against Keith, readily agreed to meet.

At the meeting Keith confided to Dingeeza that he had been aware of his plan for many months and knew all about the secret phone calls. Keith explained that he had resigned himself to leave South Africa rather than destroy the Lord's work. While he didn't tell Dingeeza about the "phone call from God," he did explain the change of heart among the pastors and the true purpose of the meeting that evening. Keith explained his concern for Dingeeza and his ministry and appealed to Dingeeza to have a change of heart before the meeting that evening. Dingeeza

was smitten with conviction as he compared his motives and actions with Keith's. With tears he pleaded for forgiveness and offered to make a full confession and restitution.

When the pastors came to the church that evening to deal with Dingeeza, they found that Keith and Dingeeza had arrived before them. They were shocked to find Keith and Dingeeza kneeling at the altar in prayer, each with his arm around the other man's shoulders. The men respectfully sat, bewildered, and waiting for the two men to complete their season of prayer. Keith and Dingeeza rose and led the men in prayer and hymns. Then, Keith and Dingeeza each preached a short message. The men all followed Keith's lead in accepting Dingeeza. No one required an explanation. Everyone rejoiced and wept at the scene of biblical reconciliation. The minutes of the meeting that night were brief: "Entire institute board of pastors met for season of prayer, singing of hymns, and soul-searching preaching. All left with a renewed sense of unity, love, and oneness of purpose." In the years that followed Dingeeza became one of the most influential pastors of the region and was often called upon to help mediate disputes in the body of Christ.