Running From Rita
By Bill Williamson

On Monday of this week I heard a word from the Lord. I have heard from the Lord many times in my walk with him, so hearing did not alarm, nor surprise me. However, the content of his words was unexpected, although pleasing to us.

For some time, Arizona has been on our minds. In fact, Arizona would have been my choice of locations when returning from Cyprus, in the Middle East, more than two years ago. But at that time, as is the case now, we only wanted to be where the Lord placed us. And God had chosen to send us to Arcadia, Florida. It has not been our favorite place to reside, but God has accomplished much since our arrival. That is always the case when we simply put our trust in him, and go, evenly blindly, as Abraham did so many years ago.

A week earlier I had mentioned the new found interest in Arizona to a couple of people by e-mail. God quickly convicted me of talking of things without instruction from him. I repented before God, and sent another e-mail telling the two people of my mistake.

Sunday came, and after church I opened a road atlas to look at a map of Arizona. I wanted to find Sanders, a small town that believing friends of ours live in part of the year. I spotted Payson, a city in the mountain area north and east of Phoenix. Something sprang up within my heart. I remembered hearing of Payson while in Bible School many years ago, but had never been there.

This past Monday I rose for my usual ‘quiet time’ before the Lord early in the morning. Arizona continued to be on my mind. I worshiped and praised my Lord for a time and then asked the question, ‘why is Arizona so much on my mind, Lord? And what is this about Payson? Do you want us to move to Arizona, or Payson, Lord?’

His answer was unexpected and thrilling, ‘Yes, I want you to live there.’ He spoke other things to me, but this was the heart of his words.

I immediately wondered if I were hearing correctly and re asked the question in a variety of ways, bordering on unbelief. The answer continued to be the same. I prayed and asked God to show me something in my daily bible reading that would confirm what I was hearing.
I picked up my Bible and opened to my marked locations for reading. When I reached Hebrews, chapter three, I found verses that pricked my heart with confirmation of what I was hearing. Verse 7 & 15 say, ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. Verse 18 says, ‘And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?’ And verse 19 follows, ‘So we see that they could not enter because of unbelief.’

I knew I was teetering on the verge of unbelief and could miss something the Lord had prepared for us. At that moment I chose to believe. When Maureen joined me later, I shared all of this with her. She was excited as I was. We purposed to keep this in our hearts, and to pray daily about it until the end of the week, Friday, which is today. We asked that God would let our excitement only grow if we were hearing right, and that it would totally diminish if not.

Our excitement of moving to Payson, Arizona has grown daily this week and we know in our hearts that our Lord has a plan and a purpose for us in Payson. We will go.

‘Thank you, Lord.’

Epilogue

That was nearly six years ago, and much water has passed under the bridge since the flurry of activities that led us out of Arcadia.

We did sell our home in seven months time. We gave our minivan to the local Nazarene Church, and with our Penske truck loaded tightly, we drove off toward Interstate 40 at Memphis, Tennessee. Hurricane Rita had disrupted, and even damaged, Interstate 10 in Louisiana, allowing no through traffic. Traveling back roads through Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, would allow us to avoid the wrath of Rita, while putting us on a straight shot freeway to Arizona.

Driving away from Arcadia in, Desoto County, was not a hard thing to do. In fact we were laughing out loud pulling out of our long driveway and turning onto the pavement. It was 4:00 A.M. and there was not much to see in our rearview mirror, and we never looked back.

After five days of travel across the US we were in Arizona, and specifically, Payson. We saw it for the very first time in our lives. The trip had gone well, even though motels had been full because of the influx of southern state residents fleeing Hurricane Rita. We had made our reservations ahead of time, so there was never a problem of a room for us. Another detail that the Lord had put on our hearts before we left Florida.

The Payson area was amazing to see. Beautiful high plateaus covered with the largest continuous stand of Ponderosa Pine in the world. We had entered Arizona at an elevation of 7000 feet, and now we had dropped off the Mogollon, (pronounced, mug-e-on), Plateau. Locally it was called, ‘The Rim.’ Payson lay 2500 feet lower some 30 miles away in a combination of Pine and Juniper.

The town consisted of about 15,000 people, (in the area, that is), and is a quaint setting with friendly people who loved being there. All the necessary supplies of life could be obtained without driving the sixty plus miles farther south to the Phoenix area, (commonly called, ‘The Valley,’ by locals).

After a few months, property would be found and we would begin the construction of our home in Deer Creek Village. The village was located thirteen miles south of Payson along Highway 87, and consisted of one hundred and four homes in a rather lax housing development.
The village is situated at 3300 feet elevation nestled near an intermittent creek actually named, ‘Deer Creek.’

The beautiful Mazatzal Mountains were just to the west of us, standing so tall with a commanding presence. Mazatzal is pronounced, ‘mad-as-hell’. The locals were quick to inform us of that. Most names in the area are taken from either the Apache language, or Spanish from the heavy Mexican influence. The Apache were native and roamed throughout the area. Other Indian tribes dwelt in the area too, evidenced by the many cliff dwelling ruins in the area.

There was a less pronounced mountain range to the east of us, from where our sunrises come from, called, ‘Sierra Ancha.’

Building a home was a dream of ours, and this was to be our chance. Our property would allow us to build with great views of both mountain ranges, and wonderful sunrises, and sunsets too.

With our home completed in only five months, bible studies were started a few months later and would continue for four years before coming to an end at the Lord’s instruction. People gathered in our home, and most in Deer Creek were from some kind of church background, but had not been active in fellowship, or a true walk of God, for some years. Our bible studies changed all that.

People were saved, instructed, and some began to attend church once again. We had gone physically to every door in the village to knock and speak to anyone who would open up. That is, except the one place with Pit Bulls, and a sign saying, ‘No Solicitors.’ If no one was home we would leave a copy of our latest book, and a letter explaining that we were beginning a Bible Study and they were invited. The book and letter were left in a bag hanging on their door knob. By the way, our books are not for sale, they contain the gospel, and we feel the gospel should not be for sale. We freely give them away. God provided the monies to pay for publishing, and he provided the stories out of our lives of following him.

In Payson, we were active in local churches, even heading up a Missions Program at one church for a time. We led outreaches to Mexico, some five hours away. Our time in Payson has been full and clearly a result of something God wanted to accomplish with us. Lives have been changed because we believed God, and came. Our lives have crossed and intertwined with many others. Friendships have been made that will remain all our years.

Now, we’ve heard God’s voice once again, and the next stop is Wichita Falls, Texas. Like we came, shall we go, without looking back.

Even so, Lord Jesus, even so.