



God at the Controls

Ethnos360

*Because of the nature of this story, please read beforehand
and be sure it is appropriate for your audience.*

PART 1

[1]

Tim Cain and his wife, Bunny, were missionaries with New Tribes Mission in Colombia, South America. They lived with the Puinave people in a village in the jungle.

Tim knew their language very well because his parents had been missionaries and lived where there were Puinaves.

Now Tim was a missionary himself. He taught Bible stories night after night in the village, and the Puinaves loved the teaching. They were getting to know God better.

[2]

One day two of the village leaders, Alberto and Chicho, came to Tim and Bunny. They were very upset. “Don’t go out of your house after dark tonight! There are guerrilla tracks around!” (Not gorillas, the big ape-like animals that live in the jungle, but GUERrillas, men who don’t like the government, and don’t believe in God.)

Tim and Bunny had never seen any guerrillas, although they had heard lots of things about them—things that made people afraid of them. Every night the dogs in the village made a big racket, growling and barking because there were strangers nearby.

One day, when Tim and Bunny were gone, a bunch of guerrillas came into the village and started asking questions about the missionaries. Some of them even stayed there overnight and then left the next morning.

Several hours after all the guerrillas were gone, Tim and Bunny came back. A New Tribes Mission pilot flew them into the village. As soon as the plane landed, the Puinaves swarmed around it, talking loudly. They were upset about the guerrillas’ visit and about the questions the guerrillas had asked about the missionaries.

When the pilot heard this news, he frowned with worry and turned to Tim and Bunny. “Don’t you think it’s getting too dangerous to stay here?”

“No,” Tim said, “we can’t leave now! The church is growing. I know who the Christians are now, and even those who aren’t Christians want to learn more about God. I’m sure that God wants us to be here and that He will take care of us.”

“Tim is right,” Bunny agreed. “This is where we need to be.” Together they waved good-bye as the pilot took off.

[3]

Several weeks later Tim was feeling quite ill, so he was lying quietly in a hammock.

Bunny was in the next room, listening to Puinave words on a tape recorder, trying to memorize them. She needed a break, so she stood up by the window and stretched, then almost crumpled in fear.

Outside were four guerrillas in camouflage uniforms running straight for the house! They had belts of huge bullets strapped around their waists and were carrying guns and hand grenades!

Bunny ran into the bedroom. “Tim! Guerrillas! What do we do?”

Tim was still not feeling well. “Go let them in,” he said.

“What? No!! We don’t want them in here!” Bunny exclaimed.

“Now take it easy. We don’t even know what they want yet.” He climbed out of the hammock slowly, making a face because of the pain in his legs.

BANG! BANG! BANG! The guerrillas pounded on the door.

“Let us in! Open the door!” they demanded. Tim opened the door.

“Hands up! And get outside!” ordered one of the guerrillas.

After a while, the guerrillas noticed Puinaves walking past the house slowly, looking really worried about Tim and Bunny. The guerrillas decided to move Tim and Bunny back inside the house where they wouldn’t attract so much attention.

[4]

As they took them into the house, one guerrilla announced proudly, “You have been captured.”

Tim was not impressed. “What does that mean?” he asked flatly.

“You’ll see,” replied the guard mysteriously. “You’ll see.”

Inside, the guerrillas made Tim and Bunny open all of their belongings and asked them lots and lots of questions.

If the guerrillas saw anything that they liked, such as the tape recorder, radio, food or money, they just stuffed it into their pockets or put it aside to take with them later. They emptied every tin, every shelf and every box in the house. What a mess!

Finally, one of the guerrillas walked over to Tim and said, “Get on the radio and call for the mission plane. Say exactly what we tell you to say. If you change one word, you’re dead! Tell them that you are very sick and need to get out.”

As Tim sat there, thinking about all this, the guard spoke again, roughly this time: “Make that call now—or we will feed you to the buzzards!”

Tim looked at the gun pointing at him. He got on the radio and called, asking the mission plane to come out the next day.

That evening one Bible verse meant more to Tim and Bunny than ever before: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28 NKJV).

They said that verse over and over to themselves and to each other. Finally, they declared, “We don’t understand it, but we believe it. God is in control!”

They went to bed. Bunny shook and shook as she tried to relax and sleep. Finally, she and Tim slept. They didn’t sleep very well though, because every 10 or 15 minutes, a guerrilla shined his big flashlight right into their eyes to make sure they weren’t trying to escape.

[5]

The next morning came. There was nothing to do but wait for the airplane to come and, at the same time, hope and pray that it would not land.

About ten minutes before the airplane was due to arrive, four guerrillas took off down the path to the airstrip with all their guns and ammo.

Bunny and Tim looked at each other. What were the guerrillas planning? Were they going to try to get the plane? Did they want to take the pilot prisoner? Surely the plane would not land.

PART 2

[6]

Paul Dye and Steve Estelle were New Tribes Mission pilots in Colombia, South America. Paul had been a jungle pilot for a long time. Recently he had been teaching Steve how to land on airstrips carved out of the jungle.

It was Saturday, and the two men were getting the airplane ready. They were going to fly to the Puinave village where Tim and Bunny Cain lived.

Tim had called for an airplane to come and get him because he was sick.

Paul almost told Steve to go alone this time because Steve was doing a good job of flying, and a chance to go alone would be a good experience for him. But at the last minute, Paul decided to ride along.

Meanwhile, for the first time since Steve had come to Colombia, he didn't want to fly. He had been away from his family too much lately. Here it was another Saturday, and he wanted to finish making a doll house for his daughter's birthday and to help his son with a fort. But in the end Steve, too, decided he needed to make this flight.

What a glorious morning. The plane cruised along, with Steve at the controls and Paul beside him reviewing Bible study notes. They dropped off mail and food to some missionaries along the way and then flew on to the Puinave village.

[7]

Just as they got close enough to see the village, a thunderstorm suddenly moved in like a solid black wall. They could see palm trees down below, bent over double from the wind.

How on earth would Steve land? Maybe he should just turn around and go back. But no, Tim was sick and needed their help.

As the experienced pilot, Paul took charge: "Looks like the only way to land in this is to come in with the wind behind us. You're going to have to use everything you know to land this one." He slid his seat up to help as Steve's copilot.

The storm was fierce, and Paul and Steve were concentrating so hard on landing safely that Paul forgot about something—he forgot to look for the village signal showing whether or not it was safe to land.

The plane bounced and pitched in the wind, but finally they were safe on the ground. Steve let out a long sigh of relief, and Paul praised him on his good landing as the plane rolled to a stop.

[8]

Finally, Paul looked out at the village. "Man, this doesn't feel right," he said, frowning. Usually there were Puinaves around the landing area. Today nobody was there, not even Tim or Bunny. Strange, since Tim had called for the plane.

Then Paul saw guerrillas coming toward them from front and behind. The guerrillas looked scary, with long tangled hair. They carried guns and had hand grenades hanging from their belts. The guerrillas ordered the pilots to get out of the plane.

"You are our prisoners," the guerrillas told them.

"We want you to take two of our men to another airstrip. If you help us, we will let you go. Does it take two pilots to fly this plane?"

Steve spoke quickly, "It makes it easier."

Meanwhile, Paul was thinking: Steve does not want to fly alone with these fellows! And if he has to fly over a part of the jungle where he hasn't been, he will get lost. Besides, it

sounds like they just want the plane and a pilot. If they get that, maybe the guerrillas will let the other one go. (By now Paul was sure that Tim and Bunny had already been taken captive.)

“Steve is a new pilot. I’m the senior pilot, so I’ll take the plane,” Paul volunteered.

“Get in the plane then.”

“Where are we going?” asked Paul. “I have to make sure we will have enough fuel.”

“How much fuel do you have?”

“Two hours’ worth.”

“That’s plenty. Let’s go!” commanded the guerrilla leader while pointing his gun at Paul.

[9]

Paul climbed into the pilot’s seat. One guerrilla crowded in behind him and another sat beside him with a gun barrel pressed against Paul’s right side.

Paul was just ready to reach into his pocket for the key when he felt as if God stopped him and gave him an idea. Leaning out the window, he spoke to Steve: “Hey, Steve, I need the keys.”

Steve gave Paul his keys without a word, but he knew that Paul already had his own keys in his pocket.

Paul put the key in the ignition, and then paused.

[10]

“Come on!” growled the guerrilla beside him.

Calmly, Paul said, “I always pray first.”

“Well, go on!”

Paul chose to understand that as meaning, “Go on and pray,” so he prayed, “Father God, we place this flight and our lives into Your hands. Amen.”

No one stopped him. Outside, one of the guerrillas said to Steve in surprise, “Hey, he’s praying!”

As Paul turned the key in the ignition, he looked at Steve. Steve gave Paul a thumbs-up of encouragement as the airplane rolled away.

[11]

Steve watched as the plane flew into the sky. Then the guerrillas made him walk toward the village path. The walk into the village with guns pointed at Steve’s back seemed so long.

But during that time a verse came to Steve's mind: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26:3 KJV).

How Steve wished he had his Bible! He was glad that Paul had his on the airplane. Then another version of the verse came to Steve's mind: "You, Lord, give true peace. You give peace to those who depend on you. You give peace to those who trust you" (Isaiah 26:3 ICB).

[12]

The guerrillas were proud to lead Steve into Tim and Bunny's house. After all, they had just captured an airplane and two pilots! Tim and Bunny just hung their heads. Big tears rolled down Tim's cheeks.

"Why did you land? Why?" was all Tim could say.

"Don't blame yourself," Steve murmured. "You tried to let us know there was something wrong. God... well, maybe God wanted us to land."

The guerrillas stuck Steve in another room, but they soon had to change that. The Puinaves had not been saying anything, but they were angry at the guerrillas. Now they spoke up for Steve.

"You say you're good people, but look at how you are treating these missionaries," the Puinave leaders said to the guerrillas. "These people speak the same language. You should let them be together!"

So, the guerrillas put Steve back in the same room with Tim and Bunny. Steve shared the verses with Tim and Bunny that had come to his mind on the walk into the village. And later, at a time when the guards were quite relaxed, he fixed the radio so that no more planes could be called in.

Steve kept listening for the sound of the plane. He remembered that the guerrillas had promised, "If you help us, we'll let you go." But as the sun went down and the sky turned dark, he knew the plane was not going to come. One thought stayed in his mind, which he shared with Tim and Bunny: God was allowing all these things to happen for their good, according to Romans 8:28.

[13]

Meanwhile, back at the mission's headquarters, nobody noticed that anything was wrong until four o'clock in the afternoon when Paul had a Bible study scheduled with someone. But there was no Paul! That was very unusual. By 7:30 it had been dark for quite a while, and everyone knew something was wrong. Jungle planes didn't fly after dark. Also, the radio had been silent all afternoon. No news, no plane, no idea what might be wrong — it was time to do something.

That night they reported the missing plane and called the main New Tribes Mission office

in North America. From there people called the missionaries' relatives and a few churches. Soon many people were praying for Tim, Bunny, Paul and Steve even before they knew exactly what to pray for.

When Steve's wife, Betsy, heard that something was wrong, she decided not to tell the children anything until the next day—maybe then the mission would know more about what was going on.

But the children had been hearing other people talk. At bedtime, they asked their mother what had happened.

Nine-year-old Kimberly had tears in her eyes. "You mean guerrillas might be holding Daddy?" she asked.

But God had been preparing the children.

They had been reading a book called *All Things—Even Frisky*.

It was about a kidnapping and showed how true Romans 8:28 is. Remember? "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God..."

Kimberly told her mom about the story of Frisky and said, "So we know this is all going to work out for good too." A little later, she was asleep.

PART 3

[14]

As Paul took off in the airplane and flew over the Puinave village, he looked very closely for any sign of Tim or Bunny but saw none. He saw many Puinaves, though. They looked so sad, standing with their arms hanging down, watching the plane.

The guerrillas made Paul go to another airstrip, where a guerrilla commander got into the airplane. He was thin, with tousled curly hair.

"Hola!" he greeted Paul in Spanish. "We want you to make one more flight for us before we let you go. Let's go."

"I'm going to pray first," said Paul, and he did. No one said anything.

[15]

They arrived at a place where the commander told Paul to land on a small airstrip. From the airstrip he made Paul drive the airplane into a small jungle clearing. What a narrow path for an airplane! When Paul had driven the plane as far into the jungle as he could, the

guerrillas were still not satisfied. They pushed the airplane on into the woods by hand.

[16]

A guerrilla took Paul on a path through the jungle to a well-hidden camp where there were simple shelters—beds made of four boards, thin foam mattresses and mosquito nets under sheets of black plastic.

Paul's guard pointed out a shelter for Paul. Paul dropped his bag on the ground and sat down on his assigned bed. How he wished this were just a nightmare and that he could wake up! But right now, he had important things to take care of. Most important was the airplane key in his pocket!

The guerrillas had taken the key he had used to fly the plane here, but they had no idea that he had this other key, and he needed to hide it before someone found out. Keeping his eyes on the guards, he pushed the key far into the lining of his shoe. No one saw him do it. "Thank you, Lord," he breathed.

As it got dark Paul climbed under his mosquito net. Every 3 to 5 minutes one of the guerrillas walked up to his net and shined a flashlight on him. Talk about high security!

[17]

In the morning Paul woke up before it was light, itching all over from mosquito bites. And as the long day wore on, he had plenty of time to think over how he had been captured the day before.

"The storm! That's how I got here," he suddenly realized. "If it hadn't been for the storm, I would have noticed there were no people on the airstrip, as there usually are."

Then it seemed as if God asked him, "Paul, who controls the weather?"

"You do, Lord," Paul prayed. And if God actually wanted them to land, well then, "Lord, that would mean that you want me to be right where I am!" Paul whispered. For the first time he began to relax a little bit.

But the next question was, "What do you want me to do here, Lord?" Paul looked around. Maybe he was there to tell the guerrillas about Jesus. So, he tried to talk to them whenever he had a chance. But he soon found that the guerrillas' training had made them very hard against any idea of God.

One guerrilla tried to explain it to Paul, "You're just like that log over there—both made of the same stuff. For me to kill you would be just like chopping that log over there with an axe."

How very wrong! And what an awful thing to believe! When Paul was alone again, he opened his Bible.

He started reading in 1 Peter that we have hope and a treasure that can't be destroyed. Because we believe in Jesus, we have a joy that can't be explained.

Paul started feeling excited. How different his whole life was from the guerrillas' lives because he believed in Jesus! He felt great—so great that he started to think about escaping. After all, he had the key. But only God could help him get to the airplane.

[18]

That afternoon Paul had a visitor. While the other guerrillas were dressed in camouflage or old uniforms, this man looked like he had stepped straight out of a city office. Clearly, he was a big boss guerrilla. He asked Paul lots of questions about himself and New Tribes Mission and asked to see all of Paul's licenses, passport and other papers.

He was very pleased to see that Paul was not only a pilot, but a certified airplane mechanic as well.

This was bad news for Paul. The guerrillas were excited about all the ways they could use a pilot and mechanic. They certainly weren't going to let him go!

But Paul did not let this discourage him. Once he was alone, he picked up his Bible again. This time he read, "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. (1 Peter 4:19 NKJV)

"Wow!" thought Paul. "I'm putting myself into the hands of the One who made all of creation—the moon, the stars, the whole universe!"

That night Paul slept better. The next day he listened to the guards talking around him. From what he heard, although other prisoners had been just where he was now, sooner or later they had been killed.

So, Paul went back to his source of encouragement, the Bible. He read one story after another of how God had saved his people from their enemies. Sometimes they didn't even have to fight! As Paul read, he reminded himself that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." (Hebrews 13:8 NKJV)

[19]

By this time Paul had decided to escape that very night. What did he have to lose? If he stayed, he would be killed sooner or later. And now he felt sure that God would help him.

Slowly, very slowly, Paul worked at getting a small log under his bed. When he left, he would put it under his blanket so that it would still look like he was sleeping there.

[20]

That night, when the guards shined their lights on Paul, he looked like he was sleeping soundly, but he wasn't. He was wide awake, just waiting for his chance to escape.

[21]

Late at night he heard a motorboat coming up the river. It sounded as if it were going to stop at their camp. The guard who had his light shining on Paul turned away and headed toward the river.

Quickly, Paul grabbed the log and stuck it under his blanket.

Still lying down, he moved out from under the blanket and started putting his other stuff under it, when—swish—a light swung round and shone on Paul.

The guard came closer and shined the light right on him.

“Oh no! He caught me!” Paul thought. He lay just where he was, frozen stiff, pretending to sleep.

The guard watched him for a while, then went and woke up the guard who was supposed to be on duty next. Paul heard them talking quietly. Soon the new guard came over and shined his light on Paul, waiting to see if he would move out of his weird position. Paul didn't move a muscle, but his heart was pounding. “Lord, take control, please take control!”

Finally, the guard walked away. Paul sighed, “Thank you, Lord!”

The next thing Paul knew, it was Tuesday morning, and he felt exhausted. That morning a guard took away the little log. How discouraging! Then God seemed to ask him, “Paul, what was it that encouraged you yesterday?”

Paul knew what to do! He opened his Bible. He read how God delivered the Israelites when they were captives in Egypt. He read about a group of men that tried to capture Elisha, and the whole group was struck blind. He read how God made 3,000 of David's enemies fall so sound asleep that he could walk right into their midst—and out again—and not one awoke.

By the time night came again, Paul was really excited about what God could do. Again, he planned his escape. He would go to sleep and trust God to wake him just before dawn so that he could escape while it was still dark but land after it was light. With his spare tank he had enough fuel to fly less than two hours. That would not get him to his mission's headquarters, but it would take him far from the guerrillas.

That night Paul slept soundly. Not even the flashlight woke him up. When he did awaken, it was pitch black, and he had no idea what time it was.

Paul sat up and prayed, “Lord, please blind the eyes of the guards who are awake. Make their ears deaf. Make the sleeping ones sleep so soundly they won't wake up until I'm gone. Thank you, Lord!”

Paul's heart pounded. Around him everything was very, very quiet. "I'll wait until I hear someone snoring. Then I'll know God is answering my prayer," Paul decided, and he lay down again.

But no one snored. Paul lay still, listening, waiting. Seconds went by. The guard came and shined his light on him. Paul went cold with fear. The guard turned and walked away.

Right then Paul felt as if God nudged him saying, "Go! As soon as you get your feet out of this mosquito net, I'll do my part!"

Paul wadded up his clothes and bag and spread his blanket over it in the dark. "I hope it looks like me!" he thought. In a flash Paul was out from under the mosquito net.

[22]
Carefully, and oh so quietly, Paul took one step at a time toward the path to the airplane.

[23]
Just as he got to the last shelter of the camp, a branch broke under his foot. Crack! Oh no! Paul froze.

PART 4

[23 again]
The branch cracked loudly under Paul's foot. He froze, but everything was quiet. Paul breathed, "Thank you, Lord!" and went on. Soon he was on the trail to the airplane. The woods and trail were wet with rain.

"Thank you, Lord. The leaves make much less noise this way," he said inwardly.

Paul's "thank-yous" and steps both came faster and faster as he headed toward the plane. But the night was pitch black. He lost the trail and got tangled up in thick vines and bushes.

[24]
Paul groped his way back to the trail and stooped over so he could feel the path with his hands as he moved forward.

Finally, Paul got to the spot where he thought the plane would be, but there was no plane! In the blackness of the night, he thought he saw a house. Paul felt confused. He didn't remember a house there. Had he taken a wrong trail somehow?

[25]
He crept up to the house and put out his hand to feel it. It was the airplane! It was covered with black plastic, logs and palm leaves.

“Oh, no!” thought Paul. “Now I have to get rid of all this stuff before I can even turn the airplane around!”

What an enormous job! And at any time, the guerrillas might discover he was missing. Well, he would just have to keep trusting God to keep them asleep or blind and deaf until he was gone.

Paul shoved off wet palm and logs and tore off the plastic. Then he wiped the whole airplane off with his outstretched arms and prayed for strength to move the plane.

He tugged the airplane back and forth. Whoops! Ouch! He slipped and hurt his back. Paul took off his shoes so he could get a better grip with his toes. With his shoes in his hand, he suddenly remembered the key in the shoe lining.

“Man! I don’t want to lose that!” he gasped. Paul stuck the key deep in his pocket and kept on working. He tugged and pulled, tugged and pulled.

[26]

Once, the airplane was really stuck. Feeling his way along the plane, he found that the tailwheel was up against a stump. Paul prayed for strength to lift the tail of the plane up over the stump.

Finally, the airplane was turned around and headed the right way. Now, he had to make sure the runway was clear. Still barefoot, Paul felt his way to the runway. He found one 55-gallon barrel at the runway entrance, which he moved to the side.

When Paul got back to the plane, he was all worn out! He climbed in, put on his seat belt and turned to pull the door shut. Suddenly he heard three heavy footsteps: Crunch! Crunch! Crunch! They were a man’s footsteps, coming from the head of the path.

“They’re here!” he thought. “What do I do?” But no one shone a light. The last footstep stopped a meter or so away. Ever since Paul had left his bed that night, he had sensed God with him every second. God had helped him through so much. It was not time to turn back now! No! Quickly he shut and locked the door and started the motor. The noisy old engine cranked up right away!

[27]

Since this was a jungle plane, Paul had never flown it at night. Now he found that the landing lights didn’t work—only the little taxi light, which didn’t help much. Besides that, the windows were all steamed up. Paul grabbed a towel, wiped the windows quickly then taxied forward. The wiping didn’t do much good. Outside, a heavy fog covered everything.

At the runway Paul couldn’t see a thing in the fog. “Lord, why? You’ve brought me this far and now I can’t see to take off.”

God seemed to say, “Go!”

[28]

Paul held the door open with his shoulder to see better, poured on the power, hung out the door until he was up in the air and then closed the door.

Up he went—30 meters—60 meters—100 meters ... aaaaaaaah! He was above the trees. Paul’s heart swelled with one deep, long “Thank you, Lord!”

There was still one problem: what if the guerrillas tried to shoot him down? Then Paul understood why the fog was there. The guerrillas couldn’t see him. Now Paul thanked God for the fog!

As the plane climbed over 1,000 meters, Paul checked for the first time to see what time it was. The clock on the panel said 1:58 a.m. Oh no. That meant he needed to land by 3:20 in the morning. It would still be totally dark.

Set this bird down while it’s still dark? It seemed impossible! But hadn’t God just helped him to do the impossible? “You got me up here safely,” prayed Paul. “I believe you can get me back on the ground again safely.”

[29]

At about 3,000 meters, Paul broke out of the clouds into the clear night. Wow! The sky was full of brilliant stars as far as he could see in every direction, and a sliver of a moon shone brightly.

Paul exclaimed, “Lord, how awesome You are! How magnificently powerful!”

Up there in the heavens, Paul praised and praised God. There just weren’t enough words to pour out his thanksgiving to Him. As Paul flew through the night, he thanked God for each little detail of the escape.

Paul was so glad that he had gotten away from the guerrillas. But now he had another reason for wanting to get back to the mission headquarters. He knew things that nobody else knew about the group that was holding Tim, Bunny and Steve captive. What he knew might be used to help free them.

Now Paul needed to land before the plane ran out of fuel. He descended to 700 meters. He could smell burnt grasslands. That was a good sign—there should be flat land nearby.

Soon Paul’s little taxi light spotted the ground. He saw brush, high clumps of termite nests and mounds of anthills—not good for landing, and he could only see right where the taxi light shone.

[30]

Suddenly there were trees right in front of him! Paul jerked back on the yoke, and the plane

lifted over the trees. The plane was very light since it had almost no fuel, so it responded to his touch very easily. Coming down again, Paul kept looking for a place to land. More trees! Up and over again.

Paul could hardly believe how calm he felt. When he flew over a fourth clump of trees, the light shone on a fence row.

“Pasture!” thought Paul, and he set the plane down, applying the brakes as hard as he could. Quickly, the plane came to a stop, and he turned off the motor.

“Thank you, Lord!” Paul didn’t know where he was, but he was safe on the ground, far away from the guerrillas.

[31]

It was still pitch black. In the darkness Paul felt all around the outside of the plane. He could not feel even one little scratch. Again, he could only say, “Thank you, Lord!”

The clock on the instrument panel said 3:23 a.m. When it became light, Paul would need to figure out where he was, but for now there was nothing he could do but wait. He tried to sleep but was too excited. He ended up using the hours of darkness to pray, especially for Tim, Bunny and Steve.

As soon as it was light, Paul climbed out of the plane. Then he saw what a real miracle his landing had been. On the other side of the fence were about 250 cows.

He gasped. “Lord, You knew I couldn’t have landed over there!”

He walked to the opposite side of the plane and saw another fence. Beyond that fence was a stream, trees and anthills. He could not have landed there either. Behind him was that last clump of trees he had flown over. And in front was a swamp with palm trees. Talk about landing in just the right spot! “That’s God!” he whispered.

[32]

Paul saw a man on horseback riding his direction. Paul went out to meet him, and the man was able to tell him the name and location of the closest town. He even invited Paul to breakfast at his ranch, but Paul was eager to call on the radio. He got his call through to his mission headquarters around 6:30 that morning, and soon there was help on the way.

If Paul could have just seen what went on at the other end that morning! Twenty people crowded around the radio, all trying to hear Paul’s voice.

Someone sent word quickly to Paul’s wife, Pat, who came running from her house in stockinged feet.

Pat had been amazed that during the time that Paul was held captive, she didn’t feel upset.

But then she heard from one person after another how many people were praying both day and night.

[33]

One older missionary lady, known as “Grandma Poulsen,” had spent long hours praying into the night. She had told Pat that God would bring Paul back soon and that he would tell them his own story with tears in his eyes.

Now Pat ran across the airstrip and football field, faster than she had run in years, to get to the radio. Afterwards she walked home with Grandma Poulsen.

“Oh, Pat,” Grandma said. “In the night God seemed to stop me from praying for all four of those who had been kidnapped and had me pray very hard for Paul. I seemed to see him trying to escape, as though he were swimming.

“Pat, dear, I wasn’t dreaming. I was just sitting up in my bed praying. And God seemed to show me that Paul really needed my help in prayer. So, I prayed on until God gave me peace.”

[34]

Later that morning, when the sound of the plane filled the air, all the people at the mission headquarters, even the school children, ran out to meet Paul. Paul’s eyes were so misted with tears of joy that he could hardly see to land and park the plane.

That afternoon everyone met in the schoolhouse to hear Paul tell his story.

He showed how he had cleared off the wings of the plane—his eyes closed as though blind in the dark, his arms making the motion of a breaststroke to show how he had cleared the stuff away.

Pat remembered what Grandma Poulsen had seen when she was praying in the night: “He was escaping as though swimming.” She got up and went round to hug Grandma Poulsen.

“Oh, Grandma,” Pat whispered. “I do believe God let you in on what was happening as you prayed!”

PART 5

[35]

Back in the Puinave village, Tim, Bunny and Steve were prisoners in Tim and Bunny’s house. One day Tim saw Alberto, the village captain, outside and asked the guerrilla guarding them if he could talk to him.

“Sure,” the guard said.

Alberto was anxious to talk with Tim.

He told Tim that the old ways and God’s ways had been at war in his heart. Some Puinaves of Colombia had always killed those who hurt them. Now guerrilla soldiers had come into the village and taken captive the Puinaves’ friends, missionaries Tim and Bunny Cain and Steve Estelle. The villagers tried to convince Alberto that the guerrillas should be killed.

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But Alberto remembered the teachings of Jesus: “Love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you.” So, Alberto couldn’t sleep. All night long there was this struggle in his heart. Shall we kill the guerrillas? Or should we love them? God’s words seemed strange to Alberto. But God tells the truth, and Alberto decided to listen to God.

In the morning, he told his people, “God does not want us to kill the guerrillas.”

That same morning, another Puinave captain from downriver came to the village. He also wanted to kill the guerrillas, but Alberto said, “No! Last night God told me to leave it in His hands.”

Alberto realized that if that chief had come one day earlier, Alberto and his people might have done the wrong thing!

As Alberto shared about the struggle he’d had, Tim encouraged him and the other Puinaves that doing good to the guerrillas was the right way. He showed them a verse in Romans: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him...” (12:20 NKJV).

Imagine the surprise of the guerrillas when a Puinave family brought them a big bowl of cooked food. Another Puinave gave them some ripe bananas, and another gave them a chicken. The guerrillas couldn’t figure out what was going on.

They also couldn’t figure out why the Puinaves were not listening to them. The guerrillas held meetings every night to try to win the villagers over. Every night they told the Puinaves how bad the missionaries were. But every night the villagers responded that the missionaries were not bad. And later each night, all the Puinave Christians would get together and pray that God would set Tim, Bunny and Steve free.

After several days, three more guerrillas came to the Puinave village. Their leader came into the hut and ordered the missionaries: “Pack a suitcase! We’re going downriver.”

By now, Steve, Tim and Bunny could see that as long as they were near the Puinaves, the guerrillas would treat them well because of the villagers. But leaving the village... well, it might mean that the guerrillas were planning to hurt them.

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As the missionaries prayed, the Puinave captain, Alberto, went boldly to the new guerrilla leader. "I invited the missionaries here," he declared. "They're my responsibility. If they're going to leave, I'm the one that should send them."

The guerrillas decided not to take the missionaries anywhere that day.

The next morning, Tim, Bunny and Steve woke up in fear that this was the day they would be harmed. "You know," Tim said, "we're just not completely trusting God."

Bunny and Steve agreed. It was hard not to be scared. Together they prayed, giving themselves to God for whatever might happen. God's peace filled their hearts, and they felt ready for anything.

Just then the guerrilla leader came in and said, "Get your stuff ready! We're going this time!"

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News that the missionaries were being taken away spread quickly through the village. All of the Puinaves gathered at the riverbank to see them off, not knowing if they would ever see them again. Some cried as Tim, Bunny and Steve were commanded to get into a large canoe. The missionaries were taken to a hidden spot in the jungle and held prisoner.

Whatever might be going on concerning them in other parts of Colombia, their life in the jungle continued one day after another.

After nine days Tim was feeling really low. "God," he prayed quietly, "I'm a father, and I know there are times when my girls need me to pay special attention to them. Well, that's how I feel right now. I need You to let me know You love me."

Steve asked, "What are you thinking, Tim?"

Tim told Steve about his prayer.

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The next morning, Sunday morning, Steve exclaimed, "Tim, here's your answer! Look at the choir of birds!"

On the branches of trees all around them sat big birds and little birds, singing and chirping. The little birds usually flew away from the big birds, but not this morning. The missionaries counted 26 different kinds of birds: parrots, toucans, and even a big old turkey buzzard. The bird choir sang for three hours. Tim, Bunny and Steve sang too, praising God. At noon all the birds left.

They watched for the bird gathering the next day, but it didn't happen. Nor did it happen the next day, or the next... until the following Sunday. This time there were even

more birds, chirping, singing and croaking. Again, they stayed until noon. When the missionaries pointed out the birds to the guerrillas, the guerrillas couldn't care less. But Tim, Bunny and Steve were thrilled that their Heavenly Father had sent the birds to show them He loved them and cared for them.

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One day the guerrillas took the three missionaries back to the Puinave village so the villagers could see that they were all right. Tim was glad to hear that the Christians were meeting together regularly, teaching others and praying always that God would release the prisoners.

"You will be set free," Alberto said, "because we have prayed!"

Chico's son said the Puinaves felt bad when the three were taken away. "It was like one of our children had died. We didn't feel like eating. We would walk by your empty house and feel so sad!"

On the way back to the jungle camp, the commander was very quiet. This was the first time he had actually seen the Puinaves and the missionaries together. The next morning, he had to ask them the question that had been burning in his mind all night: "What makes the Puinaves love you so much?"

Tim didn't give an easy answer. He just said, "Ask them."

After another week, the missionaries were told a plane was coming for them, and they were taken back to the village. They waited six days, but no plane arrived, so the guerrillas took them back into the jungle again.

The next morning, they heard a plane flying overhead. Then what a mad scramble! They were rushed to the village airstrip.

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As they neared the airstrip, the guerrillas blindfolded them so they couldn't see the plane or the pilot. They were not sure where they were being taken or what would happen to them next.

That night they were held in a different camp. The next morning the commander went with them again, on a six-hour speedboat ride down the river. There they waited and waited, even though they weren't sure what they were waiting for.

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Finally, a boat came that was almost too big for the river. People from the government were on the boat, and the missionaries were being released! The commander said good-bye with a firm handshake. Tim was shocked to see that the commander looked as if he cared. Were those tears in his eyes? Had something touched his heart while they were held captive?

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In Bogota, friends and family were waiting for the captives to be returned. After 33 days of being held captive, Tim, Bunny and Steve walked through the door.

Can you imagine the excitement? There was laughing, crying, talking and hugging. But most of all, there was rejoicing and praising God for the work He had done.