



THE ENCOURAGER



Let us never forget

MINISTERING TO ALL FIRST RESPONDERS

“Let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the day approaching.”
Hebrews 10:25

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Hi, I'm Thom McCoy, a volunteer firefighter with the East Rutherford Fire Department in NJ. This is my second go round with the fire service. My journey has not been smooth, but through it all God has sustained, called, and molded me, even when I did things my way and not His. Here is the story of my journey.

When asked to write my testimony, I asked *Why me Lord? Why was I asked to provide this Meet a Member? Do they know they have the wrong person? I'm just a "blackhat". Well I trust You. You know what You're doing. Hopefully, this is part of Your master plan for my life.*

I was raised in East Paterson, New Jersey. My dad joined Defender Co # 4, a ladder company, when I was two. I have an older sister. My father worked two jobs along with the fire department and special police. My mother worked as a secretary. For as long as I remember, they threatened to get a divorce. Still, they made sure that I went to parochial school until I was in fourth grade. I then attended a public school and attended CCD until high school when I went back to an all boys' Catholic high school. Most of my religious upbringing consisted of attending school and church when necessary.

Once when I was little, mom handed me money to put in the collection plate. I asked her, "Why? Doesn't God give Jesus an allowance?" Another memory is of the firemen who always lined the back wall of the church, standing there in case a call came in, (the church was across the field from the firehouse).

I attended college in Florida where I met a "good ole boy", John. Together we chewed tobacco and discussed the Bible. Nothing fancy, just talking and debating as we chewed. When nineteen, I moved back home after being put on academic suspension (too much freedom) and joined the Elmwood Park Fire Department. While on Truck 4, out of all the men I grew up knowing from the fire company, Big Ed Alexander was the only one I could talk to about God. He was like an uncle, brother, and friend. We even talked about how we felt when we each played Santa Claus. When I married a second time, Ed read the Scriptures. After twelve years on the truck, I moved to Engine 3. During those years I drifted back and forth to and from God.

When I was twenty-eight, my daughter Katherine was born with epilepsy and a stroke which wiped out the left half of her brain that later caused her bipolar personality. She now has a feeding tube. When she was born, I went into the hospital

MEET A MEMBER



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chapel and had a heart to heart with God. I asked for help and strength and I did a lot of crying. My life continued to be a search for a personal relationship with God.

A close bond developed between my daughter and me to the point that when I was on duty with the ambulance, she'd go into seizure. When I was with her, she didn't have seizures. Consequently, I decided to leave EMS. My daughter's special needs showed me the meaning of the brotherhood of the fire department. One example was when a lieutenant drove me to the hospital from a scene because the medics just left for my house. But when my stress led to divorce, I leaned more and more on the Lord. He continued to seek my total love when I entered the construction industry. He placed a friend, who later became a pastor, and a few other believers in my life. We met for prayer in the stairs, our own version of "stairway to heaven". I asked my friend how he knew he wanted to become a pastor. He told me that when God calls you, you can't avoid it.

When I was thirty-three I was aware of who Christ is, but distant. Then I met my second wife and came back to Christ during a Good Friday Service. I was baptized a few years later in a church where a friend from work was a minister. When my second marriage ended, I began to rely on Christ even more. He was softening my heart and placing Christians in my path to bring me closer to Him. I started going to a Christian café where I made friends with the staff who helped me expand my faith. Bert Watkins, my pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Ridgewood, mentioned that firefighting was my ministry because I was happy and helping people while I was on the fire department.

I also had an opportunity to be in a men's fellowship group where I met some well-grounded Christian men, a few pastors, and Rob Reiner. Rob also went through a divorce and helped me out a great deal. These men helped me keep things in perspective. At that time I started to think about possibly becoming a pastor, but who could relate to a firefighting pastor? God knew just the people; Joe Smaha and Russ Stammer. As I was going through the divorce, I talked to God and He showed me the answers I needed in His Word. When low on funds, He fed and clothed me. He had His hand on my shoulder all the time. He was and is my provider. I now attend Joe's church where I receive strong

Fellowship of Christian Firefighters
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biblical teaching and support. I'm learning a lot about faith and developing a deeper understanding that the Lord has a plan for my life and will use my challenges to develop me into the man He needs me to be for His ultimate purpose. He is the potter. I'm the clay.

When I moved to East Rutherford, I moved around the corner from the firehouse. After a few years I realized what was missing in my life but I didn't want to only be a firefighter. I wanted a way to work Christ into my firefighting. I was led to the FCF. After talking to Russ and Joe; I realized it was a no brainer.

My journey has not been an easy one. I do know I'm just a *blackhat* that knows how glad I am to have Christ watching my back. I'm grateful that Christ died for my sins, past, present and future, and that He never gave up on me. Psalm 23:4 helps me, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." It doesn't say we are to hang out there. We must go through it. We will make it through all our challenges so we can develop into the people that He needs us to be.

Since joining the FCF, I've had the opportunity to take part in a Blue & White Service, go to a Christian summer camp, and join the FDNY ministry and visit firehouses in NYC. I've had the opportunity to talk to many firefighters including a FDNY battalion chief who told me he always makes time for the Lord. Wow. I find it interesting that firefighters who are apprehensive to talk about their relationship with Christ, turn to and lean on Christ when everything seems hopeless.

When I had my own business, my friends and I understood that the BIBLE stands for *the Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth*. Now I also understand that the BIBLE is the SOP's that are handed down from the Head Chief. We don't have to go through the chain of command to talk to God.

Most of us are familiar with John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends," the story of the Good Samaritan, or Jude 23 where it states we are to "snatch others from the fire and save them." Another verse God placed foremost in my heart is that if we have faith and, "are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it and He will rescue us" (Daniel 3:17). God has other wonderful promises for His children. Psalm 91:14 states, "Because He loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name." "

I've felt like Jonah where God was telling me where to go but I chose not to go. I've been the prodigal son—trying to do life on my own terms—while God kept reminding me that I can do nothing without His help. Now as I go about my day, I'm continually led to notice the clock at 3:16.

At that moment, I silently thank God for sending Jesus to die for my sins.

The Bible states, "knock and it will be answered, seek and you will find, ask and you will receive." Often forgotten is that what we seek may not come in our time but if according to His will it will come in His time. I've come to realize I'm a servant of the Lord. He will direct my life. He will present me with the challenges I need to develop me. He will mold me and use me wherever He needs me, be it talking to people or fighting fires. I have the faith that He knows the plans for my life. I'm a tool in God's toolbox to be used for the tasks that He has. After all, we don't use an axe for every task on the fire scene.

May the roads to all your fires have no traffic

May you have more water pressure than you'll ever need

May you never fall short of hose

May you come home safely from each call

And until we meet again,

May God hold you in the hollow of His hand.

When "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." I don't have to hang out there. I just need to go through it.



"I" *itis*

MISSIONARY MUSINGS

by GAY REYNOLDS



Is it really summer? Seems like summer arrives later each year, or is it, I want both spring and summer to come sooner each year? Well, it seems that it has finally arrived in our neck of the woods. The grasses are turning green, (happens late in the high country of Colorado) the snow has melted, and the beetle kill continues. With the Spring moisture and the new growth and a slow wildland season last year, it appears that this might be "the year"! Add to that, the beetle kill rampant in our area and it might be a busy time this fire season. I guess, that's the "good news, bad news" report that we look forward to, but not the "bad" part. We always want to keep busy with wildland responses, but don't want private property to be destroyed. Is not that the nature of our business? Whether it's med calls, structure calls, MVA's, wildland or whatever, we look forward to responding, but not to the damage and/or injuries. We want to serve our community and those who pass through, but we don't like to see the damage and injuries that occur.

I enjoy, look forward to helping those in need, but not the destruction to body and property. I, truly, do not comprehend how firefighters can do their job, shift after shift, without the Lord in their lives. It's beyond my understanding. If you look at some of their lives, both at the station and away, you see the destructive nature of the profession that attracts them. How about you? Do you share the Lord, talk with them, gain their confidence—help them? Looking at the statistics, the "family" side of the firefighters is dismal. High dependence abuse, high divorce rate, bad health—these all contribute to the moral decline in the industry. The decay has allowed some to "take items" from homes, cars, and persons while on responses. What does the future hold? Well, this "hero" image will become tarnished beyond repair. What once was a noble profession will become one of distrust. I hope that you do not want to see that happen to your profession, your chosen field. So, what can be done about it?

If you see something, say something. If you question something, say something. If it does not look or sound correct, say

something. Only you can patrol your crew members, your shift and your department. Do not allow actions which are not becoming the profession to overtake your department! It starts with you! And, Don't suffer from "I itis!" It is a killer! Think about your actions and the repercussions on the department, the profession, and firefighters around the world! Don't allow the "brotherhood" to cloud your judgment. Hold everyone, including yourself, to a high and higher standard. If not you, WHO? If not now, WHEN? Do not buy into this *Abuse of Trust*. Don't think your actions will not affect others, they will! Do not think that this little drink, or little drug help, or the short look at pornography, or what ever is OK for you. Get rid of "I itis", think about others. Think about how your attitude and behavior affects others! How effective are you on a call while under the influence? How responsive will you be to come to the aid of a crew member? Get rid of "I itis" and think "crew" or "team!" There is no "I" in "crew" or "team".

Conduct yourself above any suspicion. And do not allow your crew members to sink to new lows. Keep the well being of your department, the respect for firefighters, always at the forefront of your thinking. We have an obligation to the people we serve to stand way above the norm. We are putting our reputation on the line every time we respond to a need. And, we are putting the reputation of EVERY FIREFIGHTER on the line because of our actions. Yes, our actions—both on duty and off!

Yes, I know, I'm preaching to the choir, but we need to keep the image of firefighters clean of any question. And to do so, it has to start with you. I don't see any gray areas in God's Word. Black or White! That is all there is! A little sin, just a little violation of the SOP's, it is alright (if I do not get caught!), the "guys" will cover me. The Word says you either walk in the light or in the darkness. So, where are you walking? Where do you want to be walking? How are you going to get there? When?

My Brothers and Sisters, since Washington and the Fathers of this nations' time, firefighting and the men and women that make up the responders have been deemed to be noble. Noble in their willingness to respond to others needs quickly and above reproach. Do not let the actions of a few bring us down to a low level of respect (or no respect). Help them change. Bring them up to the high level of honor and respect this profession has enjoyed for many decades. Only you can make the difference in their lives and the community's perception of firefighters in general.

Be Bold! Be safe! God Bless!

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Memorial Tribute and Respect Conference



Prior to FDIC in Indianapolis, Sue and I were privileged to attend The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) meeting/training in Tampa, FL. and The Federation of Fire Chaplain's training in Indiana. Our knowledge of the scope and outreach of both ministries increased immensely.



Created by Congress in 1992 to lead a nationwide effort to honor America's fallen firefighters and to provide their family members with resources with which to rebuild their lives, NFFF saw this only as the beginning. They've since developed and expanded programs that fulfill that mandate. In addition they've taken a prominent role in developing initiatives targeted at preventing future firefighter injuries and fatalities. This nonprofit corporation receives no direct federal financing, but depends on grants, private and corporate contributions, and partnerships with government agencies and fire service organizations to support its programming. Included in those programs are:

- The National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend: the official national tribute to all firefighters who died in the line of duty during the previous year.
- Fire Service Survivors Network: a network to connect survivors in similar circumstances.
- Fire Service Survivors Conference: a special week of activities designed to address issues related to loss, participate in training to prepare those who reach out to other survivors, and network with others who have experienced a similar loss.
- Scholarship Program: provides educational and job training assistance to the spouses, life partners, children and stepchildren of fallen firefighters.
- Taking Care of Our Own®: trains fire departments to prepare for a line-of-duty injury or death.
- Local Assistance State Teams: provide support and assistance to fire departments coping with a line-of-duty fatality.
- The Chief-to-Chief Network: provides support to fire service leaders dealing with the aftermath of a firefighter fatality.
- The Everyone Goes Home® program: advances individual firefighter health and safety as a key priority for every fire service organization.
- The www.lifesafetyinitiatives.com web site: a new web site being developed by the NFFF as a portal for delivery of firefighter health and safety information and services.

Of special interest to FCFI is the Local Assistance State Teams: Through a collaborative effort with the Department of Justice, the NFFF trains teams of local fire service crisis support personnel in each state to provide hands-on support in the event of a firefighter fatality. Team members provide comfort and assistance to the family, and are able equipped to offer guidance with funeral planning, finances, and benefit information. **What a blessing it would be to have FCFI members and chaplains on each state team.**

Federation Of Fire Chaplains

The Federation Fire Chaplains (FFC) began around the same time as FCFI with a complimentary goal. FFC trains firefighters to be chaplains. FCFI is here to help provide the tools for you the members and chaplains to reach the fire service. We highly recommend any current or hopeful chaplains to look into the FFC program. FFC's training equips people with the tools to more effectively reach the fire service and the communities they serve. October 17-21, 2010 they are holding their annual conference and training in KY. Details are on their web page: Federation of Fire Chaplains or contact Ed Stauffer at chapidir1@aol.com