

Miracles that follow the plow :: The secret of Earnestine's prayer closet

The secret of Earnestine's prayer closet - posted by followthelamb (), on: 2019/4/6 13:05

"Earnestine Reese, 72, has been recuperating from a broken hip suffered during the March 3 tornadoes in Lee County that killed 23 people and blew her home completely to the ground, except for her prayer closet.

For decades, Reese would retreat to the prayer room to pray for the health of sickly relatives, or pray for peace and safety in times of storms or troubles.

Now the wall of her prayer closet is filled with prayers, put there by relief workers from around the country, who wrote out their prayers with a black marker. Without logical explanation, every wall of the brick house fell during the tornado, except a small section by the closet where Reese had prayed for decades. Even the two-by-fours that framed the closet ceiling still stand.

Earnestine's church clothes hung in that closet, along with church hats and purses she carried to church. They all survived. So did Reese and the three other people upon whom the house collapsed - her daughter, LaShawn Wilson, LaShawn's husband, Kolaya Wilson, and their son, Qumran Wilson, Reese's grandson, named for the place where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.

Although they were not in the prayer closet during the tornado - they went to shelter in the bathroom, which they considered the safest room in the house - they still prayed.

"That's what we do," LaShawn said. "That's how we get through. That's what's getting us through even now."

LaShawn grew up in that house with the prayer closet, and was living in a house next door. She has been taking care of her mother for more than three years, since Earnestine had an infection after a surgery to replace a battery in her pacemaker.

On March 3, LaShawn, Kolaya and Qumran ran over to Earnestine's house as a tornado approached. LaShawn put Earnestine's shoes on, got her oxygen tank, sat her in her rolling walker chair, and took her to shelter in their safe room, the bathroom. The distant roar of the tornado sounded like a stampede of horses to LaShawn and Kolaya. LaShawn told Qumran to pray. "I said, 'Son, pray your way through.' Three times, I said that."

The house began shaking. "The roof went," LaShawn said. "It collapsed. It slammed us down. This presence, I describe it as the hand of God, was holding us down. The debris was so close."

Earnestine shouted out to her grandson. "Qumran, call on Jesus!"

LaShawn grabbed his hand. "I held my son's hand tight and said, 'Keep praying.'"

Then they noticed the walls of the house were gone. All except that small wall. "The closet was still standing," LaShawn said. "My son wiggled out," she said. "My injuries were substantial. I couldn't move."

Then they braced for what felt like another tornado. "I gripped the vanity," LaShawn said. "It was more rain and wet and then it got very cold."

After that next storm passed, neighbors, who were also relatives, came to help. "My mom was trapped still," LaShawn said. "This is all a family neighborhood. It's home."

As she sat suffering with a broken hip, Earnestine was captured on video by her nephew. "I thank the Lord," she said. "You tell God, 'Thank you, God.' You hear me?"

That video went viral on Facebook. Then a few weeks later, a relief worker heard the story about the prayer closet and shared a picture on Facebook. Earnestine's prayer closet went viral.

That's a lot of viral social media celebrity for a 72-year-old. Earnestine, who was sleeping and resting when a reporter visited her apartment on Tuesday, was not available for comment. But LaShawn explained that the idea of a prayer room, and praying, was not anything new for her mother.

"When we were little girls, we knew, this was Mom's room," LaShawn said of the prayer closet. Sometimes, she pulled her daughters in there and had them pray with her. "She would pull us all together," LaShawn said.

In 2015, a Christian movie called the "War Room" focused on a mother who had a prayer room where she prayed for her family. Some people assumed Earnestine borrowed the idea from that movie.

More likely, the movie idea came from people like her mother, LaShawn said. "We thought, 'Who doesn't have a prayer closet?'" LaShawn said. "That was Mom's prayer closet. That was nothing new."

It was days later that the family realized many of the items stored in the prayer closet didn't even fall off the clothes hangers. "It was touching to know that was still there," LaShawn said. "It was the hand of God. God had it happen the way he meant for it to happen. We lost many lives."

Seven of the 23 people who died were relatives of the family, LaShawn said. All of those killed in the March 3 tornadoes lived in a roughly one-square mile area of the community of Beauregard in Lee County. More than 90 people were injured and multiple homes and businesses were destroyed.

Earnestine's family is thankful for the help from plenty of people, including Providence Baptist Church near Beauregard, which served as a disaster relief center offering help for tornado victims; the East Alabama Medical Center Foundation, which provided an apartment for the family while Earnestine goes through rehabilitation; the First Baptist Church of Opelika, which provided furnishings for the apartment; Samaritan's Purse and Eight Days of Hope, Christian disaster response teams that helped clean up the tornado aftermath.

God's will includes praying through trouble, LaShawn said. "The power of prayer in our family is something we've always known."

Many people are calling the survival of Earnestine's prayer room a miracle. "There's been more than a few miracles," said Tonya Knight, a volunteer coordinator at Providence Baptist Church.

"Within an hour of the tornado, this church was full of people," Knight said. "Within a few hours, it was full of supplies. Every need we asked for has been met. Tragedy brought us together. We hope we stay together. The way everybody has come together has been amazing."

LaShawn said the lesson of her mother's prayer closet is that prayer is important, all the time, in any room, in any place. "I'm finding a closet myself," she said. But it doesn't have to be a closet, or a room. "It's finding a place you can tap into that moment with God."

<https://www.al.com/life/2019/03/the-secret-of-earnestines-prayer-closet-prayer-works-in-other-rooms-too.html>