

## HOPE FOR NEXT YEAR'S PROBLEMS

Sunday, December 31, 1995. The big backpacking trip is over. It was exhausting, and I am still weary and sore.

We rose at 4:30 a.m. Thursday morning and got an early start. Unanticipated logistics in shuttling cars, however, made us almost two hours late in getting on the trail. This put us way behind on time and distance. We probably covered only three to four of the six miles that had been planned. We had to make camp about 3:30 p.m. because darkness fell so early in the valleys.

It was bitterly cold, probably 10 degrees when we awoke Friday morning. My back hurt so badly that I was afraid to hike any further and asked for prayer for relief from pain.

We were so slow in getting camp torn down that we didn't get on the trail until around 11:00 a.m.--and then covered only five to six miles. After an hour or two of hiking, my back pain had completely disappeared.

We camped that night at Lick Creek and were awakened around 2:00 a.m. by the sound of sleet hitting the tents. We arose in total darkness to find the trees coated in ice and the rocks becoming glazed.

"Breakfast" was just hot chocolate (hastily heated under the equipment tarp) since we needed to break camp as quickly as possible. We began a forced march at 8:00 a.m. in hopes of avoiding being icebound in the valley. Over the next four hours we made our best progress yet--about eight miles.

We paused briefly for more hot chocolate after crossing the Little Piney and prepared to assault the final 1.5 miles, which appeared extremely rugged on the map. The last quarter-mile was an 800-foot hill that quickly wore us down. I brought up the rear, moving at a snail's pace.

We reached the vehicles about 2:00 p.m. to find two would-be deliverers, friends who had braved icy highways. They were prepared to initiate rescue efforts had we been trapped.

All in all, the hike proved more challenging than expected because of adversities that popped up without warning. But the bunion on my right foot, my greatest concern at the outset, never bothered me at all. In fact, neither foot was ever cold or wet or hurt.

The teenage boys were put through some rigorous physical tests--and were stretched. We adults were not exempt.

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I wrote this account on the eve of a new year--as I do this one today. And as I read it again, I see four lessons to help me put next year's concerns and problems into perspective.

1. Our greatest fears may not materialize at all.
2. Unexpected obstacles will arise when we least expect them.
3. We can find unexpected strength and growth in our trials.
4. Deliverance may be just over the next hill--from God or friends He sends.

Robert E. Lee was right: "It is history that teaches us to hope."