

LOSING THEIR FARM BUT NOT THEIR FAITH

The hot sun in northern California added to the fatigue I felt, working as foreman of a large ranching operation. I owned my own farm—200 acres of almond trees. But years of bad weather and skimpy harvests forced me to take on additional work to provide for my family.

Still, my efforts didn't seem to help reduce our debts. My wife, Geneva, and I took additional loans to cover our farming expenses. The trees had to be watered, sprayed, and fertilized, and the wages had to be paid. All that created more debt. I couldn't get back on my feet.

I'd lost a farm previously, and starting over was difficult then. This made Geneva and I determined not to fail again. We spent many sleepless nights struggling to find a way to pay all of our expenses.

One day, Geneva brought me the bad news: "Oh, Richard, I've just been to the farm credit company. They've taken it all! We're being forced to sell. They have a buyer; there's no price negotiation. All they want is our signatures."

Her voice trailed off into sobs. I put my arms around her and began to weep too. Everything that we had worked a lifetime to acquire was gone. I was 50 years old and had been in farming all my life. Where would we go? Since the farm credit company had taken our land and our two bank notes, the crop that year would go to the buyer. We had no money to start over. Two of our eight children were still at home. How would this crisis and relocation affect their lives?

In spite of the overwhelming loss and grief, I knew that God was in control of our situation. I remembered the Bible story of Joseph. Even as a slave and prisoner, that young man was part of God's glorious plan. As for me, I knew that God must have something better for our future too.

Two weeks after the creditors took our farm, things got worse. I lost my job as a ranch foreman. Our family moved into a compact rental unit, and Geneva and I began working a series of minor jobs, including a stint at a fast food restaurant. It was difficult to pay down the \$100,000 debt that was left after all of our assets were seized—our land, equipment, home, and bank notes. There were many times that we didn't have money for groceries and living expenses, but God provided for us through our family, friends, and church.

A year-and-a-half later, God gave us our new direction. Geneva and I were offered a management position at an exclusive, 2,600-acre waterfowl hunting club in northern California. The club catered to wealthy clients. As we served at the club in numerous ways, we realized again and again that money and possessions cannot bring happiness. We had lost everything, yet we had joy in our lives.

After we had been at the club for about a year, I received a call from the head of the credit company that had taken our farm. He wanted to talk with us and insisted on making the hour's drive out to the hunting club.

As we sat together, he said, "I want to ask you something personal. A friend of mine recently lost everything he owned. His wife just committed suicide. We at

the office have noticed that you two are handling this crisis differently than most people do. Can you tell me what your secret is?"

I was happy to explain. "We believe in the God of the Bible. He is sovereign over our lives, and he is in control. Even though the pain is real, we are confident of this: God has proven sufficient and able to take care of us."

Geneva added, "God's Word promises, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

It was true. Throughout the entire ordeal, we never felt alone for a single moment. Later, as the head of the credit company rose to leave, he thanked us. "You've given me a lot to think about," he said quietly.

(Adapted from "Christian Reader")