



*Flo Harvey*

Hi. I'm Flo Harvey. I am the local crazy lady who has eight children, makes a pretty decent floral arrangement, and spends more time than I'd like to admit looking for lost keys, lost wallet, or some other important item. My husband, Mike, and I have attended Northridge Friends in Wichita, Kansas, for over twenty-five years. I pray that you will be blessed by the writings this week from the dynamic, windswept Kansas prairie.

*BIBLE READING: Mark 4:18-19*

Over the last decade or so, the Kansas prairie has been invaded by several unwanted species of plants. One very onerous tree is the red cedar. It takes over the landscape, starving the native grasses with its shadow, and stealing scant water resources. Farmers and ranchers depend on these grasses to feed their cattle. In the scorching south winds that continually blow across the Kansas prairie, red cedar trees become dry, brittle piles of brambles, easily-ignited, explosive, fast-burning, and hard to extinguish. They produce hot sparks that easily blow in our winds.

I can't help but think about my own life, and how "invading species" such as apathy, pride, disobedience, and fear creep ever so stealthily into my life. They seem innocent and non-offending at first glance, but left unattended, they begin to overtake our lives. They choke out what is good, leaving little to feed on to encourage new growth.

My worship then becomes stagnant and relationships are strained. Love is choked out for some cheap imitation, and the fruit of my life, if any, is tasteless. I become weary, burdened, and arid, consumed by ravenous thieves that "steal and destroy" (John 10:10), instead of living life abundantly.

May each of us be vigilant to watch for these persistent invaders. May we work diligently to keep them uprooted and not give them a chance to entangle and overrun our lives, leaving us susceptible to ruin.

*SONG: Kind and Merciful God*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father God, help us to come to you with unconfessed sins. Don't let us allow them to grow and overtake us. May we repent quickly and fully before sin has a chance to take root. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: Isaiah 9:18*

Recently, invading red cedar trees, the extended drought throughout the West, and days of high levels of the prevailing south wind merged to create the perfect conditions for a wildfire of historic proportions. Just one spark from a cigarette, lightning strike, barbecue, or train could start a chain of events with epic results—a prairie fire.

And it happened. On the parched plains of northern Oklahoma, a spark started a fire. It took hold and spread. It burned relentlessly, acre after acre, fueled by the dry grasses and the exploding red cedars, pushed by the unceasing winds. Fire knows no boundaries, so it flowed from Oklahoma into southern Kansas, growing north and east. State to state, field to field, county by county it made its relentless move north. The smoke was visible on weather radar, and from space.

Once again, I think of my own life. How sin, left unconfessed and unchecked, can leave me weak, vulnerable, and unprotected. And in that dry, weary, and unrepentant condition, I am susceptible to destruction. One careless action, thought, or deed could ignite a consuming fire, burning through my “fields,” devouring everything in its path. That reminds me not only to be vigilant, watching for sneaky invaders, but that it is essential to keep reading God’s Word, praying, and seeking accountability. Doing this will keep conditions in my life from deteriorating or drying out, and keep flames from erupting, causing me to fall.

*SONG: I Surrender All*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, may we willingly surrender to you and your will. May we rely solely on you and repent from any waywardness in our hearts. Keep us from destruction. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: Romans 6:23*

Once the fire ignited, it raced across the dry brush, blackening the prairie at breakneck speed. Growing to epic proportions, it devoured everything in its path. It seemed that nothing that stood against it could be victorious. Its intensity could not be contained. Homes burned to the ground, fences and outbuildings were gone, hundreds of cattle could not escape and died. There was no place to hide and no sanctuary from the fire's fervor.

A burning smell permeated the air, noted as far away as St. Louis. The atmosphere was filled with so much smoke and ash that the sun appeared red in the sky. At times, the smoke was so thick the sun wasn't visible at all, even miles from the fire.

When we move away from God's will, we often don't realize how far-reaching and intense the consequences of our wayward actions can be. Those wrong actions don't affect just us. Damage can spread quickly and widely, putting our homes and families at considerable risk. Ultimately, our own health can be harmed, even to the point of death.

I don't want to take those kinds of risks. Not for myself, my family, my church, or others around me. I would rather go to my Lord and Savior, and get things set right. I need to consider the consequences of my behavior early on, so that I might not do harm to myself or others by allowing those "invaders" to become a blistering inferno. May it never be!

*SONG: Through It All*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, help us to seek your guidance and wisdom in all things. May we use that wisdom to count the costs and consequences in our actions and may it all glorify you! Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: 1 Timothy 6:12*

The fire grew and grew and grew. Multiple fire crews from all over Kansas converged on the charred Kansas prairie, strategically using all their knowledge and resources to battle this relentless foe. But it seemed to all be in vain. Just when they thought the fire was contained, the wind would pick up or an ember blown by the wind would spark another blaze further along.

Ranchers and firefighters, including many volunteers, became exhausted, drained, overwhelmed. As the fire continued out of control, these brave men and women often found themselves fleeing in retreat from the flames. It seemed as though the fire was mocking them, chasing them as it laughed at their feeble human attempts at controlling God's nature. It was a chaotic war, one beyond redemption, a war that they could not win on their own.

How often do we find ourselves in similar predicaments? Tired, confused, overwhelmed. We fight the foes of life to the best of our ability and knowledge, but with no victory in sight, maybe even fleeing in fear, chased by the enemy. But God....

When fighting the good fight, we cannot rely only on our strength, or the fire will consume us. To obtain victory, it is essential for us to do battle adorned in the spiritual armor of our Lord and Savior, and to lean heavily on his strength and power. It is the only way to douse the raging fires and win the war of life.

*SONG: Onward Christian Soldiers*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father in heaven, may we always seek you and your strength and power. May we never try to battle life's foes alone, and may you fight every battle beside us. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 37:23-24*

In the wake of the fire, a barren, flattened, blackened wasteland remained. Everything was charred, empty, and unrecognizable—or completely gone. No grass visible, no trees. Hundreds of miles of fences were destroyed, train trestles burned, homes were leveled, burned cattle and wildlife died where they were trapped. Very little in that battle zone of more than 400,000 acres was untouched. The hope of a good future looked as black as the ground.

But as ranchers, homeowners, and firefighters surveyed the damage, signs of God's tender mercies began to appear among the remnant. Prayers for a small family-owned radio station near Medicine Lodge were answered when the fire did not burn either of their radio transmitter buildings and towers; but instead went around them in a near-perfect circle, charring the ground around them. The towers had been cut off from any human possibility to defend them. But God...

This reminds me that even if we've made mistakes, or when we face trials and tribulations, God is there already. Though circumstances seem overwhelming, and our lives dry and barren, God is there. We can count on him to walk with us through the fires of life, for strength, endurance, and mercy. He is our hope and peace no matter what the landscape. We just need to seek and trust him, even when all appears lost, and the landscape unrecognizable. Jesus knows the way through the smoke and ashes.

*SONG: Gentle Shepherd*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, life can sometimes seem empty, barren, and frustrating. Help us to look to you and your leading each and every step of the way. Hold us and keep us under your guiding hand. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 12:25-26*

Those firefighters worked tirelessly under dangerous conditions in canyon-filled western Kansas, where canyons often blocked access to the fire or to safety as they battled to contain the flames. People from the communities they protected brought in food and water to support them. A church canceled their Easter programs to offer shelter and showers to those helping and those who were displaced. As the fire cleared areas to the south, farmers and ranchers from surrounding counties trucked in huge bales of hay for cattle now without pasture, and brought supplies to rebuild fences and lives.

It was a joy to watch as God began to work “all things together for good.” Firefighters and communities rallied together, not only to battle the fire, but to support one another and those who were affected by the tragedy. Needs were identified and met. Comfort and care were graciously and tenderly given as the people fought for their neighbors’ property as if it was their own. They were truly God’s representatives here on earth, and great examples of what community should look like.

This working together was both inspiring and challenging to me. Do I respond likewise in my community? *Do I “firefight” alongside my friends and neighbors when they are in the midst of an inferno of trouble?* Am I Christ’s hands and feet? I know there is room for improvement in my life. How about you?

*SONG: Blest Be the Tie That Binds*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, may we love and care for others in our communities in ways that meet needs and glorify and honor you. Amen.*

—Flo Harvey

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 72:6-7*

Kansas prayed to see storm clouds on the horizon, instead of billowing plumes of black smoke. Then it came. Soft and slow, tender, merciful rain. It gave firefighters the much needed advantage against persistent hot spots to bring the flames under control. It washed the smoke, ash, and soot out of the atmosphere, bringing the first fresh, clean air in days. The scorched, dry earth took in deep gulps, satisfying its long-denied thirst. It seemed as if the community and the earth breathed a big sigh of relief. In God's beautiful wisdom and design, the very smoke that rose from the fires helped bring the rain to the parched ground. In a matter of days, communities began their recovery, and so did the land.

As many in Kansas know, these harsh wildfires are a common event in the spring, though not at this epic level, and we also know that from the death and blackened lands comes the promise of restoration and new life.

As we face the trials of life, painful, difficult times can seem unending and wearisome. Our efforts feel futile and we long for relief and restoration. We pray fervently for help. God is faithful to bring showers of revival and renewal in his time. He brings new growth out of charred and blackened places that adversity tries to claim. Thanks be to God.

Oh, and on Easter morning, we awoke to find that God had covered all that blackness with a beautiful white three-inch layer of snow. What a God we serve!

*SONG: Revive Us Again*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, may you use the trials in our lives to burn away any chaff and create new growth and revival in its place. Amen.*

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