

## Beauty Out Of Ashes

by Ruth Hickman

Upon our return from the glorious Kansas Invasion weekend, we unpacked our suitcases and Chuck took them to the basement storage. As he stepped on the basement carpet, his feet sank into water two inches deep. I remembered my exact words spoken over a year ago. "I don't want to return from a trip and find water in the basement." That statement had been made when the hot water heater was not heating water fast enough for my shower. So, as a precaution, we had a new heater installed. How could a "new" hot water heater run over? The plumber informed us the water pressure was too high. We needed a pressure release valve on the water intake line, so he installed that with a new turnoff lever.

Now, what about the wet carpet? We used the shop vac and tried to suck it up. It was seeping toward the bedroom at one end of the basement and toward my sister's stored boxes of photo albums and family treasures at the other end. Also, my cedar chest sat flat on the floor at the deepest water level. The obvious move was to call the insurance company. Within an hour a truck arrived from a "damage and restoration" company, and two men were soon moving boxes, putting furniture on boards, pulling the carpet padding, and setting fans. We were now going "deeper" than I ever imagined. For four months we have been going through a purge, removal, and restoration process.

What a spiritual lesson! As humans, we want to apply a Band-Aid or a quick fix and go on with life. But the cause of our problems, our sin nature, is still there. Like David, we need to cry, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean." (Psalm 51:7a) Jesus is our sin-purger. His Blood has cleansed us from our sin and we are new creatures, but we still have problems, many of which arise from our genetic makeup or generational curses that have been transmitted from our ancestors. So, we need to uncover more!

When the insurance adjuster and the restoration foreman met, we were informed that the carpet must be stripped and removed. OK. That means we will get a new carpet. Things began to look up. But wait! As the carpet comes up, so do some 9-inch tiles under the carpet that were probably placed there when the house was built 40 years ago. So, remove them!

The telephone call came a week later. The tests showed that the tile had asbestos backing. According to EPA standards, everything had to be removed from the basement so the environmental hygienist could remove the toxic matter. Where would we put everything? How could we do this?

Praise God! This was not our job. Five women came for one day and three came back for half a day and packed 140 boxes of stuff -- books, magazines, tax papers, treasures, photo albums, clothes, dishes, bedding and junk. Then four men moved everything - two freezers, washer, dryer, bed, bookcases, couches, table, chairs, etc., and the 140 boxes into crates which were taken to a warehouse somewhere. The basement was bare.

In like manner, the Holy Spirit is sent by our loving Father to remove everything that we will allow Him to take so that we are empty of our past, our failures, our hurts and offenses. He allows us to be "cleaned out" so He can fill us with Himself. ".....the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." (Hebrews 9:14)

The asbestos was cleaned up and the restoration began. We had the dark paneling on the walls painted an off white, tile was laid in the laundry room and bathroom, and new light Berber carpeting covered the rest of the floor. It was light and bright and lovely. Then came our work. The stuff was all returned from the warehouse. Were we going to put all the stuff back into our lovely clean basement? The decision made, Chuck and I spent two weeks sorting, discarding and recycling to the Salvation Army. We had to open all 140 boxes and decide what was valuable and where to put it. Much needed to be disposed of permanently!

After we are saved, and God cleanses our hearts, He gives us the choice of what offenses, pain, old character traits, etc., we want to hang on to. "But now you yourselves are to put off all these-- anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, out of your mouth....and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him." (Colossians 3:8-10)

As I sit in my restored and beautiful basement, I marvel at what has been accomplished and I meditate on what God might yet require of me. I'm always grateful for the promise in Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."

We are all still in process, and no matter what circumstances might come our way, we need to allow God to do a deeper work in us. Remember, He has promised, "To give them (us) beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they (we) may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." (Isaiah 61:3)