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Saved for a Purpose

BY KEREN TOMS

What I remember most about Thanksgiving every year is hearing the shattering of glass and the sound of crunching metal—the sound of change—the sound of a moment that would completely change my life.

They tell me it was a good thing I was asleep. If I had been awake and tensed up, it would have caused devastating damage. Then again, if I had been awake I probably wouldn't have crashed. Still, driving to work early one crisp Sunday morning in November during my senior year at Andrews Academy, I was overcome with sleepiness and dozed off behind the wheel. The impact sent my car rolling several times and snapped my neck, fracturing the fourth and fifth cervical vertebrae.

Unaware of how much time had passed or exactly what happened, I was hardly able to answer the questions of the police and medics who arrived on the scene. Who should they call? I think I mentioned Superman would be a good place to start. Somehow they managed to contact close family friends as they rushed me to the hospital. After a series of x-rays, medical personnel determined I was fine, removed the neck brace, and jostled and rolled me around. It wasn't until several hours and an MRI later that they discovered the seriousness of my injury.

After getting over the initial shock of totaling my first car, I became conscious of the fact I could have been killed or paralyzed. Any number of things could have happened, but nothing did. I realized I had a purpose. Whatever I was going to do, I needed to do it with purpose and with passion—and it needed to be in line with whatever God was asking



Keren Toms hugs a camper at Timber Ridge Camp in Spencer, Ind. Keren served as camp pastor for Junior Camp 1 in 2009 when Dondrell of Benton Harbor, Mich., was a camper.

Joshua Pedroza

me to do. He had saved me for a purpose. God saved me for a reason, and I needed to take that seriously. Now, I felt it was my job to figure out what that was.

Upon completing my last year at Andrews University, I spent time as a student missionary working at our school, Nile Union Academy, outside Cairo, Egypt. Through leading worship, teaching Bible and building relationships with the students, I learned two things: First, I really liked telling those young people about Jesus—the Jesus I love and the God I know (the misconceptions people have about Him—that He's angry and violent and made bad things happen to good people—just didn't sit well with me). I wanted to work on correcting those misconceptions. Second, I realized I needed further training if I wanted to

be better prepared to answer their questions. Yet, each young person who gave their heart to the Jesus I love seemed to be the confirmation I needed to head in the direction of ministry. After returning to the States, I enrolled in the Seminary at Andrews.

After studying in the Seminary for a year, I was offered an interim position as outreach chaplain at the University. I thought, *Outreach—that's like missions. I like that. And I get to work with college students? Even better!* I began retroactively mapping my life and was amazed at the many intersections that only God knew where they would lead.



Keren Toms fell asleep while driving her first car and rolled it several times.



Following the accident, Keren was rushed to the hospital where doctors initially didn't realize her neck had been broken.

This was another one of those moments, it was a huge one for me; I was only 23! But then I remembered the words of Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations” (NKJV). After my first year, the temporary position became full time.

My work is incredible. I see so much potential in the students here. I’m passionate about developing in them their ability to see need in people and not look down upon them. It’s taking the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are the meek...” (see Matthew 5) and giving them a perspective of what it means to tie social justice into evangelism.

That accident helped me realize there was something more to what I needed to be doing, more than just doing things for me. You can read, “For I know the plans I have for you” (see Jeremiah 29:11) all you want, but it’s when I actually experienced with decisiveness and clarity that is actually the case, as in me being not dead or paralyzed, that I woke up. To me, that was God saying, “I do know because you are alive.”

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak to the student body about being involved in outreach. I asked how many of them had been involved in service. Would you believe every single hand in the audience shot up! Then I asked what service was. Giving time? A class? A program? Something we do when we have too many speeding tickets? What is service? I asked them to look with me at Acts 3:1–12, a passage which contains the story of how a lame man at the temple gate, Beautiful, was healed by Peter and John.

What if Peter and John had taken the time for service that day? They could have sat down and talked to the man, which would have comforted him for a time. Or perhaps given him a morsel of bread, which may have satiated him for an afternoon. They might have even been able to give gold or silver,

which would have supplied his needs for several days. That would have been service. But what service is Christ asking us to do? In verse 6, we see Peter’s reply to the lame man, “silver and gold I have not, but what I do have I will give you. In the name of Jesus, walk!” Peter and John had something greater than service to give; they had a transformational change brought about by the power of Christ working in them. It was giving of self, both powerful and empowered—it was thinking big. It was a miracle. That is outreach.

The lame man was desirous of money alone, a temporal want that could have been met by Peter and John. But what they gave him instead was his eternal need met by God. That was outreach.

When faced with moments were we can serve, or we can take part in the transformation of the life of another, we must remember that when we join our weakness to His strengths, our ignorance to His wisdom, our unworthiness to His righteousness and our poverty to His exhaustless wealth we will be rightly equipped to continue the life-changing work Christ has called us to do.

Keren Toms is chaplain of outreach at Andrews University and an associate pastor at Pioneer Memorial Church.



Keren Toms leads out during a time of worship at Pioneer Memorial Church.