

## Why Fire Teams Matter

I recently took my family from Bowling Green, Kentucky for a long weekend trip to Chicago. Our trip was to include parks, beaches, museums, ball games, shopping and sightseeing. Our trip was not to include any life-threatening illnesses, major surgeries or prolonged hospital stays. For a few days we enjoyed most of the things on the first list. It was a great bonding time for our family in early August just before our oldest son heads back to college and our youngest son gets busy with school and fall sports. From Wednesday to Saturday afternoon we enjoyed all the things that make Chicago a great place to visit. We had deep dish pizza, saw the symphony in Grant Park, caught the fireworks at Navy Pier, watched the Cubs lose at Wrigley, visited the Lincoln Park Zoo, the Field Museum, the Art Institute, ate a great dinner on Rush Street, walked Michigan Avenue and saw the view from the top of the John Hancock building on a beautiful sunny Saturday. Our trip was winding down and we were trying to squeeze in some last minute things before leaving for home on Sunday.

At about 3pm on Saturday, my wife began to experience some stomach pain. It was nothing too alarming at first but it got progressively worse up to the early evening. By 7pm we were at Nike Town on Michigan Avenue and she was miserable. She told me she needed to get back to our hotel. I told the boys we were going back and gave them specifics of what to do and what not to do on their own in the big city. She and I jumped in a cab to go the few blocks back to our hotel. Within 30 minutes she was doubled up on our bed at the hotel in excruciating pain after violently throwing up. She's generally pretty tough so we didn't panic. First thoughts were stomach virus or food poisoning, but the pain did not subside in the least after nausea. Usually with those things you have a few minutes of relief after being sick. For some reason, I had a strong feeling that we needed medical help. She begged me not to call an ambulance, hoping it would pass. After 10 more minutes it wasn't passing and that strong feeling was still with me. I called the concierge asking about the best hospital in the area and they advised me and called the paramedics. By 8pm we were in the back of an ambulance on the way to Northwestern Memorial Hospital. By 1am my wife had been diagnosed with a very rare and life-threatening condition that would require a serious surgical procedure and no time to think about other options. I was numb as the chief surgeon reviewed the diagnosis, recommended treatment and potential risks with us. The potential risk piece was surreal. By 3am they were wheeling the love of my life off to surgery and I was left alone in an empty waiting room, 400 miles from my home. The boys were back at the hotel asleep and I was alone with my thoughts, my beautiful wife's life in the hands of people we had never seen until 2 hours ago.

Then I remembered that I wasn't alone at all. My Savior was right there with me and if I'd turn this situation loose, He would take over. I did. I began to pray and to reach out to others who I knew I could count on to pray with me. My Fire Team. It was the middle of the night but I got word to everyone who I knew I could count on to help me pray for my wife and for God's wisdom in helping us through the situation. During my 2 1/2 hours in that empty OR waiting room, I realized that I might be by myself, but I wasn't alone, and I never will be in any time of crisis. I will always have my Lord, and I will always have a group of brothers to lean on when I'm not strong enough to hold up on my own.

At 5:30am the chief surgeon emerged from the OR to tell me that the surgery had gone as planned but now there was a new set of risks with the recovery. Again, the potential complications were daunting and the best case was 3-5 days in the hospital. But as morning broke the e-mails and text messages were coming through and there was a network of friends and loved ones reaching out

electronically to say they were praying with me. Calls from people who care made me feel better and not as far from home as we actually were. All of these things were happening even before my wife made it from recovery to her room.

At 7:15am on Sunday morning, the patient transport folks wheeled my spouse into the hospital room and she looked very much like someone who had been through a traumatic surgery. For the next 24 hours she was absolutely miserable as countless doctors and nurses tried to find the right combination of pain and nausea medication to make her comfortable so she could begin to rest and recover. Nothing seemed to work and the conversation with the chief surgeon about potential complications kept replaying itself in my head. Finally, by late Monday evening the right formula was found and for the first time in nearly 48 hours my wife began to have some comfort. At least as much comfort as you can have with an NG tube down your throat, a catheter and an IV pumping lots of strange fluids through your body. But a little bit of improvement was something to grasp at.

Throughout all of this friends and loved ones were thinking about us, and praying for us. There is no way to describe what that meant. It felt great to know that when I was too tired to keep it up, there were still people praying for us, and even better to know God was hearing each one.

As my wife began to make gradual but steady improvement, concerns moved from fear to logistics. At some point we had to get home, we had to get our sons home. High School was starting for our youngest on Thursday and it looked as if we were still going to be in the Windy City. Our oldest son was missing work and the ability to store away a few last dollars before leaving for college. By this point I had gotten several calls, texts and e-mails from guys in my Fire Team. Each wanted to know how they could help and to let me know they were thinking about us and praying for us. I was looking at flying the boys back and one of my Fire Team brothers told me he would pick them up in Nashville and get them home. As I was preparing to make flight arrangements I got a text message from another Fire Team brother and it said, "I would like to drive up tomorrow and bring the boys back". I didn't even know how to respond. How could I even think about accepting such an offer? This brother was going to take time off from work, drive over 400 miles to Chicago, pick up our sons and turn around and drive that same distance back just to help us out. We spoke on the phone and as I tried to tell him it was too much, he continued to say he wanted to do it. With some hesitation, I agreed, and I couldn't stop thinking about what an amazing act of kindness this was. Sacrifice for a friend. In Fire Team we often talk about striving to "Live By His Life", to try to model the behavior of Jesus. While none of us can ever sustain that, doing this has to be our goal. If we try hard enough and with a little luck here and there we might emulate Him for a brief moment. In this moment my friend had done just that.

Now, about 60 days later, as I think back on this experience, I cannot stop thinking about how important it was for me to have a Fire Team. There were many loving, caring people who helped us make it through my wife's scare. We are thankful to all of them and I'm happy to say she is recovered and doing great. But when I was in a dark, lonely hospital waiting room uncertain about where things were headed I thought first about my Jesus, and second about the men that I knew I could count on to get me through this, my Fire Team. They stepped up with prayer, support and selfless acts of kindness and I don't know what I would have done without them.

I love these men! We do life together. I gain from their experiences and they gain from mine. They are **MY** Fire Team! Do you have one?