

“Does God really care about me an’ Uncle Teddy?”

Here was the true purpose of this enchanting conversation.

“Very much, little phoenix.”

“Then why’s he punishing us?”

“God is *not* punishing you.” Greg wrapped his arm around the little girl and drew her close. “You and Uncle Teddy are both very special to him. He’s helping you become even more special than you already are.”

“I don’t get it.”

“Well, little phoenix, everyone is special to God, but we’re special in different ways with different talents and dreams. To God we’re all as unique as our fingerprints are. But as I see it, we usually fall in three general groups of specialness.

“There’s the specialness like my parents and Uncle Davy’s parents and your brother Jason. They got to go home to heaven long before they turned into grumpy old people like Grandpa Pierce.”

Kylie giggled a little. She liked Grandpa Pierce. He reminded her of Uncle Teddy.

“Others are special differently. God blesses them in ways that shield them from most troubles so they can grow and be special in their own way. Kinda like the way God shielded your sister Ruthie the night of the fire. She went to

sleep and didn't wake up until it was pretty much over. Ruthie's special in a way that needs a blessing of protection like that."

Kylie looked at her sister who was sitting on their dad's lap over by the fire, holding a stick with marshmallows on it while her head rested on Daddy's shoulder.

"But then there's the special ones like you and me and Uncle Teddy. God's plan for us is way different. We're like the mythological phoenix."

"I know about myths," Kylie frowned. "They're really lies."

"But all myths are born in reality because the devil doesn't have an original thought. He has to steal God's thoughts and twist them. Some people think the existence of myths disproves the truth, but in reality they tell us there is a truth to be found."

Kylie was looking up at Greg with her eyes full of questions, so he pressed on.

"The myth of the phoenix has a truth in it. See, the phoenix was a beautiful, very special bird. It was one of a kind. It couldn't make babies so it seemed destined to just disappear from the face of the earth. When it was a thousand years old, it flew tiredly to its nest and sat down to die. Sure enough, it burst into flames and burned down to just a heap of ashes. It was destroyed. All its special beauty was gone.

"But after a while there was a stirring in the ashes. It wasn't the wind blowing it away. It was a little baby bird growing out of the ashes of a life that had been destroyed. This bird wasn't really a second bird. It was the first bird reborn from the ashes, even stronger and more beautiful than it had been before the fire.

"Some of us, like you and me and Uncle Teddy, we're special like that phoenix. God is going to allow us to go through fires that burn us down to nothing, just like the phoenix. Sometimes we're kinda lolo, crazy dumb, and we sit in those ashes and growl and snap at God, refusing to become the new, improved bird. We need to have the courage to stop snapping at God and reach for his hand again. He'll raise us out of the ashes, just like he'd planned to do when he allowed the fire. We'll be better, stronger. We'll have a faith that's been tested and found to be true."

Kylie stared at him thoughtfully. "Was Jesus a phoenix?"

"He was the best and brightest," Greg grinned broadly. "The truth of Jesus' resurrection is at the heart of the myth of the phoenix. It's the truth that the lie points to."

Again Kylie was thoughtful. "So if I let God make me happy again, I'll be a phoenix like Jesus?"

"That's right." Greg was almost breathless with the wonder of watching God work a miracle in this young, wounded heart. "Can I ask you a favor, little phoenix?"