

Hooked On Recovery

February 10, 2006

Hot Water Heater

One day, several years ago, Mickey was having difficulty with a car he had just bought. After several trips to his mechanic the problem was still not fixed. He got on his cell phone and started complaining about his cruise control, about how the garage was not handling the problem to his satisfaction, and more related stuff. Inspired by the voice of my sponsor reverberating in my brain, my response to him was, "Isn't recovery awesome?!?" Mickey recalls stopping dead in mid-rant. He said, 'What do you mean 'isn't recovery awesome'? I said simply, "Three years ago, you were living under a bridge and today you're complaining about cruise control! Isn't recovery awesome?" He didn't think it was too funny then, but he laughs about it now.

I just had a chance to practice "perspective". Sandy sent Joshua downstairs to the basement to find an empty storage tub. She had set aside much of a Saturday to attack the family room toy closet, a daunting and frightening project. At night, when I'm sitting in the big ol' brown chair, I can hear slight rustling sounds and other bizarre noises coming from the closet. This is a sure indication that the reproductive cycle had begun and that scouts were being sent out to establish colonies in other areas of the house. There was other evidence, too. Small plastic objects were again appearing in strange places. I was very proud of Sandy. She was going to go on the offensive and cut down their assault before it could even begin. Joshua came back up the stairs, tub in hand, and with the nonchalance of an 11-year old, "Dad, there's water all over the basement floor." Reacting appropriately, I spit out my mouthful of chili and eggs. Not a pretty sight. We never have water in the basement. "Where in the basement?" "It's coming out by the weight bench." I thought, "The weight bench? Huh? What? Then I figured it out, the hot water heater, next to the weight bench... oh crap!"

I hurried downstairs leaving my chili and eggs, one of my "experimental" breakfast dishes that I now believe God rescued me from finishing. Downstairs and barefoot, I stepped in a puddle of warm water. Using my God-gifted analytical ability, I deduced that since the water was warm, it must be coming from the hot water heater. Well water is cold. Especially in winter. Since, the water heater was making unusual gurgling sounds and water was coming out the top through rusted spots around the fittings, I came to the conclusion that the hot water heater was in fact, broken. Having come to that brilliant conclusion, I had no idea what to do next. Life had, once again, cast me into new territory. I told myself that I've handled a lot worse. I prayed and asked for some help from my heavenly buddy. He's handled things like this before, I was sure he could handle this. I settled down, took a deep breath and I tried to learn what I could by looking. Cold water goes in here, hot water goes out here, natural gas line here, temperature gage, pilot light (I remember lighting that once), burner... aaaahhh, a number to call for service, this was good. First things first, turn off the cold water going in. Let's see what happens. The water stopped leaking. The heater stopped gurgling. Yes!

Normally, I would have responded by getting irritated, aggravated or upset. But I wasn't. I actually thought, "well if this is the worst thing that happens today, then it has been a very good day." This surprised me. I called Arno first. I have friends like Arno, or Jon, or Brian that would look at something like this, know the water heater was shot, go buy a new water heater and install it. Not me. I didn't know the water heater was completely gone. Sad, I know. Water bubbling out the top should have been the final clue. But next time I'll know. Arno wasn't

available. I called the Connecticut Natural Gas service number and they said someone would be out. The guy was at our house in ten minutes! If that isn't a sign that God was at work then I don't know what is. Russell confirmed we needed a new water heater. He was a warm, friendly guy and I had a sense I could trust him with my ineptitude. I asked tentatively, "Russell, what would you do?" "Well, CNG could do it, but you'd have to wait until Monday. I'd go to Home Depot or Lowe's and sometimes they can do an emergency install the same day." Thank you, Russell. Good answer! Hot water heaters are sold in stores. Excellent, I could go buy one. This was looking better; I even have a Home Depot credit card. Next, I called my dad. I respect his opinion and knowing me for all my life, he's well aware of my strengths and weaknesses. Without laughing, he confirmed Russell's idea of going to a store and buying one.

Samantha, Matthew and I headed for the Depot. It was time for an adventure. While the kids were thinking this was going to be great fun, Dad is thinking that this was going to be more than a thousand bucks. When the three of us scouted out hot water heaters and saw them for less than \$400, I was relieved. We also upgraded from a 40 gallon heater to a 50 gallon. With four kids, who are on their way to becoming teenagers, we will need the extra 10 gallons. After talking with the sales guys, Home Depot could have a contractor install it the same day, too. Since it was going on the credit card, of course I was going to have them install it. I knew I was in over my head; no way was I going to try to install it. Their slogan, "You can do it, we can help" did not apply in this case. Water, electricity and natural gas sounded like a recipe for a flood, an electrocution, an explosion or some lethal combination thereof. No Tim "The Tool Man" Taylor for this guy.

A couple hours later, after I cleaned up all the water and wet carper remnants, another Russell, who was the father of five, showed up in an impressive looking plumber's truck. Even with Matty asking him a question every 17 seconds, Russell took out the old heater and put in the new in less than an hour. If I had tried it, it would have taken me about 4 – 6 months depending on the hospital stay and recuperation time. I saved a lot of pain and money. I'm not sure how having only cold water would have affected our lives, but I'm grateful we didn't have to find out. The things we take for granted like a hot shower. I take one every day, yet rarely do I think how blessed I am to have hot water. It's just a part of my life. Just 6 hours after Joshua discovered water in the basement, a new hot water heater was installed and functioning. Our lives didn't miss a beat. I wonder if we might have been better off with just cold water for a few days...

Any way, I realized some really cool things about all this. I felt the hand of God in something as simple as replacing a water heater. I realized how fortunate I am, as is my whole family, that we have the resources to replace a hot water heater. How many people don't have running water never mind hot water? How many people don't have a home, or a car, or a bed, or even food? How could I possibly get upset at replacing something as luxurious as a hot water heater?

Isn't recovery awesome?

Hooked on Recovery is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, a father of five and just another surf fisherman. These thoughts, views and opinions reflect on his personal recovery and are not meant in any way to speak for the entire recovery community. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at phillip@ccar.us. Visit the website at www.ccar.us to read the entire series.