

# PARKING LOT ADVENTURES

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Sitting here at Starbucks I'm trying to get some writing done, but life never stops happening, throwing wrenches as fast as I can deflect them. Sometimes we can predict the future fairly well and other times life plays its unpredictable game—hence the Adventure I'm always talking about. This morning was going to be simple, get up, get ready, and spend from eight o'clock to noon writing. But Chris's car is broken down, meaning that he's driving our second car, so after taking Terry to work and going to Walmart to pick up something for someone else, I got here at ten. Now I've finished my cheese Danish and hazelnut latte, replied to a couple of emails, and here I am at 10:30 just beginning.

However, the two women sitting by me are distracting me. I think they're selling something through home parties. I thought it was Pampered Chef but now they're talking about body wash, could it be Avon? There's a tube of lotion and a bottle of spices sitting on the table, how confusing is that? Enquiring minds want to know!

I'm going to tell you about a crazy adventure Terry and I had last Monday night, partly to share a funny story and partly to show, again, how God is always creatively speaking to us.

Terry and I meet with a group of kids (in their twenties) on Monday nights, and had decided ahead of time that last week, instead of meeting, we would go out to local stores to practice listening to Holy Spirit. Often He wants us pray or encourage someone, and it's not only fun for us but usually blesses the person that gets ministered to. There is no pressure, we aren't out to stalk people and annoy them with God, we just LISTEN and see what Holy Spirit quickens us to do. We're to walk naturally supernatural and be listening all the time to hear if Holy Spirit wants us to minister to someone, and by making a specific trip out to practice, we not only bless someone, which is addictive in itself, but we begin to develop the mindset of always listening.

Monday we drew names to pair up, and I was looking forward to going with one of the kids in the group, as Terry is much bolder than I am in this kind of situation. But wouldn't you know, Terry and my names were drawn together! So we headed off

to Target. We quickly learned that it was a bad time to do this, being ten minutes before the stores closed no one was around but busy employees.

As we walked by a guy cleaning up in toys I felt my heart quicken, and as I asked Holy Spirit what to say the guy pulled out a walkie-talkie and talked to someone. When he was finished I just stepped into the aisle where he was and said, "I just feel like God wants you to know that as clear as you hear the person on the walkie-talkie, you're going to hear God that clearly." His face lit up and he said, "Wow! Thanks!"

At that point we left and headed to Walmart, since they're open 24/7. Getting out of our car we see that to the right of Walmart sits a stopped car, as if it is ready to pull ahead and stop in front of the door. Another car, on the same road, is trying to turn around, and why it doesn't just pull out into the parking lot I don't know. It manages to maneuver itself until it's at a ninety-degree angle to the stopped car, where it is now so tight it's stuck and can't finish turning around since its front is only a few feet away from the side of the stopped car. At this point Terry and I have stopped our walk toward the store and are watching to see what this car is doing, and as Terry starts gasping "NO! STOP!" and I'm saying "Oh Jesus!" the turning-around car backs right into the big concrete base of a light pole behind it.

Suddenly a big black guy comes running up from behind us, apparently knowing the people, calling out to us "Their transmission just went out!" He begins pushing the back of the car away from the pole, so Terry runs over and begins to push too, after motioning for the stopped car (uninvolved in this except for being in the way) to move on, which he does. (But if you were sitting in a car and a car is running into poles and ready to run into the side of your car, wouldn't you have the brains to pull you car out of harm's way without being told to?)

There are two women in the car being pushed, an older woman who is driving and a college-age Chinese girl. Terry motions for the driver to turn sharply to the right so they can push her around and into the parking lot, but instead, as the guys get the car moving it just heads straight ahead, and we all suddenly realize it's just going to run right into the side of Walmart. The car stops a foot away from the wall; maybe the driver has remembered where her brakes are even if she *doesn't* know how to turn the wheel. Meanwhile the passenger is frantically trying to turn the wheel while the driver just sits there as if she doesn't know what's going on.

Terry runs over, opens the driver's door, and says to the driver, "Pull over into the parking lot over there while we push." He and the man begin pushing while the passenger again leans over and works to turn the wheel in the direction of the parking lot. They get the car pushed about halfway there when suddenly the car just speeds up and drives off, through the parking lot and away.

Terry walks over to where I am, looks at the black guy, who is now walking away, and says, "What was that?" The guy just shrugs and says, "I don't know!"

WHAT! HE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW THEM?

By that point we were pretty much out of time, and after walking through Walmart in a daze of laughter wondering "what just happened here?" we head back to meet with the others. No matter how we process the whole thing none of it makes sense.

Why did the man think their transmission was out if he didn't even know them? Why didn't the driver attempt to drive, other than having her brakes on when they tried to push, and trying to back up even when she was against the pole? Why was the Chinese girl in a car with someone who can't drive, unless she was teaching her to drive, but then she would have been telling the driver to turn the wheel instead of doing it all herself. Why didn't the driver just turn around in the parking lot (almost totally empty at nine on a Monday night) instead of in the main road directly where the other car was sitting?

But consider this scenario: You've come to Walmart to shop and for some reason need to turn around. As you do so you back into a pole, and suddenly a big black man comes running out of the darkness and up to your car, and then another man, and they start pushing your car and yelling instructions, even opening your car door. There's no time to think as they push and shove your car around and tell you what to do. Wouldn't you, as soon as you could, quickly drive off too? Forget what you came to Walmart for!

Even as we were laughing and shaking our heads over the whole thing, we also knew that God was using it to tell us something. The timing of it on that particular night couldn't have been a coincidence. That's the thing about life, God is constantly speaking to us, and everything is part of the adventure. And how funny is it that God would take our attempt to minister to someone else and use it to speak to us? Over the past month Terry and I have been pressing our group towards some

things we've wanted from them, and what we heard God saying to us out of that experience is "stop pushing the kids, there's nothing wrong and they don't need your help." It was a continuation of what He'd already told us, "Stop looking at what you're doing and look at what I'm doing."

There were some good stories that night, not only of how God used our kids to minister to others but in ways that we hadn't expected. For example, one pair decided to go to Half-Priced Books since it was open later, and the guy ran into an old friend he'd not seen in a long time and reconnected. One girl, Natalie, was separated from her partner, and when she texted him to see where he was she sent it to the wrong number, and a stranger texted her back saying she wasn't him. Natalie texted an apology ending with "Is there anything you want me to pray about?" That started a conversation via texting of Natalie praying for the girl's family and several other issues the girl has going on.

The point is to always be listening to Holy Spirit to see how He wants to minister and bless others (or, as in our case, to hear how He wants to speak to you!).

Sitting here eavesdropping at Starbucks, I now realize that these two women sitting beside me aren't in a home-party business, they work in the school system and are coordinating the fund-raisers for the rest of the year. And it's noon, and I'm heading out to the post office and then home for lunch.

Keep listening, both physically and spiritually, because there's no telling what you might hear!