

Prelude



The melody of my favorite song fills the air as I skillfully maneuver my gleaming new sports car through the hairpin curves. Many personal sacrifices have been required but I have finally achieved my career goals and am beginning to enjoy the fruits of those labors. The contract I signed before leaving my office this morning will ensure my financial security for many years to come and it seems that all nature has turned out to help me celebrate. What a beautiful day for a drive! The sun shines brilliantly in a crystal blue sky; everywhere I look, the earth is bursting with the new life of spring.

I smile and wave at a passing motorist as I reflect upon all the warnings I have heard about this particular route. It certainly appears safe enough and it isn't as though I am alone. Many others are traveling this highway. Obviously, the danger, if any exists, has been blown far out of proportion. Admittedly, the pace may be a little too fast for some and yes, there are a few tricky spots to navigate but all things considered, I prefer to take a few risks. I decided long ago that life would be unbearably boring without a splash of adventure thrown into the mix. Truth be told, the promise of excitement was quite likely the deciding factor which enticed me to turn in this direction.

From my vantage point, there are no obstructions to block the spectacular view. Since the freeway divided several miles back, I am facing no oncoming traffic and have a clear view of the double lanes stretching before me. I cannot suppress a smile as I imagine this highway to be my personal yellow-brick road; leading me straight to fame, fortune, and happiness! My self-congratulatory

thoughts are momentarily interrupted by a flash of movement up ahead. Redirecting my gaze, I spot two children waving at me from the back of an SUV; a little boy and his sister I presume. I wave in response which causes them to collapse into giggles and quickly duck behind the seat.

Glancing to the left, I notice an elderly couple in a large sedan pull alongside and then pass me, driving fast. Obviously, I am not the only one willing to take a risk or two! I count their presence as further evidence that people of all ages are discontent with the boring and ordinary. All of us seem to be seeking a solution for the restlessness in our hearts. I understand that longing very well. What I don't understand are those who play it safe.

"Why would anyone miss the opportunity to enjoy all this beauty and excitement simply for the sake of security?" I wonder. Shaking my head in frustration, I conclude that the answer is beyond my comprehension.

I allow the car to decelerate as I take a moment to relish in my surroundings and reflect on my situation. Life has certainly been good to me: a great job, a loving family, vacations to exotic destinations. And this car! It handles like a dream. I round a curve and press the accelerator to ascend a steep incline. The car responds instantly, a testament to the power of man's imagination and ingenuity. As I crest the top of the hill and head into a straightaway, I realize immediately that something does not look quite right. For a moment I cannot put my finger on it and then I understand. There are no other vehicles in sight. "Where did they go?" I wonder.

Before I have time to consider the question, I notice a man running toward me from a car parked haphazardly on the shoulder. He is frantically waving his arms and shouting but I cannot make out his words. He turns and points in front of me. My eyes shift to follow his gaze and, just in time, I slam on the brakes.

The smell of burning rubber fills the air. Time appears to stand still as the scene unfolds in slow motion before me. The bridge has collapsed and the unsuspecting drivers ahead of me have been thrown violently into a deep ravine. My car is also racing towards the edge despite my having the brake pressed all the way to the floor.

My hands clench the steering wheel. Nothing I can do. Too late. I close my eyes and brace my body for the impact.

It doesn't come. Holding my breath, I slowly open my eyes to discover that my car has shuddered to a stop on the very brink of the precipice. The shaking begins slowly at first but soon my entire body is wracked with involuntary tremors. Tears flood my eyes. With a racing heart and knees which threaten to give way with every step, I stagger from the car and peer over the edge. The sight of the wreckage is ghastly and I fall to the ground, overcome with grief at the loss of life among the devastation below. The realization of how close I came to suffering the same fate chills me to the core.

No longer beautiful, the vivid scenery around me seems to pulsate menacingly in time with my pounding heart. Shock threatens to paralyze me but I realize with a sense of extreme urgency that there is something I must do. Those who came before are beyond help but many others are traveling the road behind me. I must tell them of the danger. If I don't, they will certainly die. In the distance, I hear the faint roar of approaching traffic and I struggle to my feet.

I take a deep breath in an attempt to clear my head and force my weakened legs to stumble toward the sound. It occurs to me that I am now fulfilling the same role as the person who warned me moments before; saving me from certain death.

"Stop!" I scream hoarsely. "Don't go there! The bridge is out!" A few slam on their brakes in response to my agitated appearance but many more continue past me. I watch helplessly as they race toward the edge. Some smile and wave. Others refuse to look at me; deliberately ignoring my warnings. Still others point at me, mock my frantic gestures, and laugh with their companions. My heart breaks as they disappear over the edge. The sound of screaming metal and breaking glass fills the air again and again and again.

With tears rolling down my face, I cry out, "Why? I tried to tell them! Why won't they listen?" I sink slowly to the ground in stunned despair.

"Don't stop. Keep trying." I raise my eyes to see who is speaking but there is no one visible. There is only a voice unlike any I have heard before; a voice which speaks directly to my heart and resonates with love, power, and compassion. *"Some will listen and, by*

hearing and believing, will be saved. Warn them. Share what you have learned. That is why I spared you.”

I long to ask questions, but there is no time. My purpose has been made clear. And for the first time in my life, I realize that the restless yearning that has kept me constantly chasing illusions has been stilled. In an instant, I have been changed. I have been changed as completely as if a skilled physician had taken a scalpel and surgically removed the pride, the competitive nature, and the self-centeredness that was so firmly embedded in my character.

Changed, not by chance I realize, but deliberately changed to accomplish a specific purpose. I listen intently and hear in the distance the faint rumble of more approaching vehicles. The sound grows louder and louder.

“Now go and be My voice.”

I can see them appearing over the horizon; many more cars speeding toward me, delivering their unsuspecting passengers straight into danger and death. Men, women, children. All races. All ages. All income levels.

Doubt threatens my resolve. How? I can't! Why me? I am not prepared! What if I fail? But there is no time. Lives are at stake. I feel the gentle hand of love on my shoulder; reassuring me I am not alone. I realize I can do this if I will relinquish my need for control and rely instead on His wisdom and strength.

Resolutely, with my eyes fixed firmly upon the prize, I push beyond my personal insecurities and run forward to meet them. Propelled by His grace, I race to share the gift of life with my brothers and sisters.