

One From the Road

Self-preservation is an important consideration when driving in much of Africa. The mixture of fatalism, lawlessness - and otherwise-powerless persons feeling the power of the steering wheel, presents some daunting challenges.

After several years there I was surprised to observe a certain driving habit I had developed. I found that I would crowd the centerline when vehicles came toward me well into my lane, as they routinely do. Rather than meekly moving toward the shoulder, or even just holding my position, I would actually move toward them. I was surprised at myself!

I thought about it, wondering why it happened so naturally. I observed my driving for a while and realized that I was subconsciously doing it to protect myself. There were usually people and animals on the edge of the road. If I moved over to give part of my lane to the oncoming obnoxious driver, I would have nothing further to give away without hitting someone if they didn't move back into their lane. So I would crowd toward the vehicle, and then when they moved back into their lane I would do likewise. It worked well.

One day a thought came to me when I saw myself do this. Maybe from God. The thought that this is how I handle personal relationships, too. And that the way we drive can tell a lot about us in general. I didn't like that possibility at all.

I began to look at how I responded when people came at me on my side of the road. I'm speaking of human relationships here, not vehicles. Sure enough, I had to admit that rather than yielding and letting them take advantage of me I was quick to move toward them, to force them back to where I thought they ought to be in our relationship. It was cause for some serious and fruitful heart searching!

I then began to think about other driving habits. How courteous am I on the road, and what does that say about how I extend kindness toward others in the experiences of life? I was both encouraged and humbled.

There are many possible applications. What does it say about the person who has to be in front and bullies others in order to get there? Or who blinds us with his lights on high beam at night?

For a short time I had rough going with a leader I reported to in Africa. I better understood why, after riding in a car with him for several hours one day. It was at the time that I was coming to see the potential correlation between driving habits and human relationships. I had never ridden with anyone who was so abusive of passengers, pedestrians and vehicle. Two fellow missionaries and I rolled our eyes at each other in disbelief and hung on for dear life. It correlated with how he handled people he was in tension with and helped shape my response to the situation.

It has been humbling and instructive for me to look at my driving and to ask God what it reveals about me as a person. It has affected both my driving, and relationships, for the better. Crowding the centerline is not always bad, nor does one necessarily need to hold their turf (unless you're driving in Africa). And sometimes becoming more and

more like Jesus includes learning to yield to others in various situations. It is important that we are able to give space to others, even some of our own. It is an ongoing part of my life's pilgrimage.

I dare you to take a look at your driving habits! You might learn something about yourself – maybe more than you want to know at first! I'm not suggesting any absolute correlations here, just some interesting possibilities! It could help you and those close to you enjoy the trip just a little bit more!

Born in 1940, Ken Stoltzfus has worked as a pilot, ordained Christian minister, businessman, missionary to Africa and writer. This is #5 in his series "The View from up Life's Path," and is one of many short articles that can be found at www.John2031.com.

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