

RANSOMED  
HEART  
ministries

August 2007

Dear Friends,

This is a story about an old '78 Toyota Landcruiser. Sort of.

I love driving this simple, straightforward, no nonsense truck. No on-board computers, no electric windows, no navigation system. (The last thing I need is a voice telling me where to turn: "Merge right. Exit right in one quarter mile. Exit now.") I love the simplicity of old cars. Anyhow, I went to move it yesterday evening but the battery was dead. There's a quirk in the brake lights that makes them stay on sometimes after I've turned the car off, and if I don't pay attention, it drains the battery overnight. Quirkiness comes with old cars. And people.

Anyhow, I solved the problem for the moment by jumping the truck with our other car, but I knew I hadn't driven it far enough or long enough to charge the battery off the alternator, knew I'd have to deal with it this morning before I headed into work. When we jumped it last night I noticed my battery terminals looked corroded. I thought, *Maybe all I'll need to do is clean them off.* Hope springs eternal.

As I unlatched the hood and propped it open, I was struck by the fact that it's been a long time since I've looked under the hood. I had that nagging feeling of, *It's been a long time since you looked at anything under here.* It's not a good feeling, that feeling of neglect, and what might need to be faced here. I have the same awkward moment every time I see the floss in the bathroom drawer. Anyhow, back to the Landcruiser.

The first thing you meet when you look under the hood of most cars is the radiator – the black boxy-looking thing with the little silver cap on top. Water and anti-freeze go in there. It's how your car cools itself. I thought, *Uh Oh – when was the last time I checked the water level?* I don't even remember. Last summer? Popping the cap off, I can see no fluid. *Yikes. Better fill that.* I look around the garage and find an old jug of Prestone, begin to pour it in. The reservoir of the radiator is a labyrinth of tubes, and you never know how much fluid you need in these old cars until you just start pouring it in. The more it takes, the longer it's been since you took care of it. Quite a bit goes in before the green stuff finally appears near the top.

As I screw the cap back on, my thoughts turn to the oil. A deeper angst creeps over me. *When was the last time I checked the oil?* I can't remember that, either. A sort of discomfort-becoming-dread fills my stomach, like ice water. It's one thing to forget to keep your radiator filled. If things go wrong, you'll typically find out right away because your car overheats and steam comes blowing out. But by the time you realize you blew it with your oil, deeper damage has usually been done to your engine. Like a faithful old camel, this Landcruiser will run till it drops. But you don't want to do that to a car. You don't want to find out you forgot to add oil by having your engine seize.

Now, I'm standing there knowing all this, knowing I need to check the oil *now*...but something in me hesitates. I don't want to know. I don't want to go there. I know it's been a long time. And I don't know that I really want the information that lies at the end of my dipstick.

Standing there, looking down into the front end of my car like an idiot, immobile, I'm watching all this and I'm struck by the fact that I don't really *want* to have a look, and I recognize the feeling. I have it around my checkbook (when was the last time I balanced it?). I have it when I drive past the dentist (when was the last checkup I had?). I have it around anything I know I've neglected, especially if the neglect has carried on for some time.

We do this with our internal life most of all. Something will come up to cause us to realize it's been a long time (have we ever, really?) since we had a look under the hood. An argument with our spouse. A sudden and very strong pull to someone else's spouse. Fear over a coming presentation. Anxiety. Depression. Someone else simply asking the question, "How are you doing?" We sense rumblings beneath the surface, and we don't want to go there.

I've got to have a look. This can't go on. I search around to find the dipstick, pull it out with dread, and sigh with relief to see that though it's low, it's not dangerously low. I sigh to realize I haven't been driving with no oil for who knows how long, and so the pool of ice water drains out of my stomach. I find a can of 5/30 on the shelf behind the snow boots and paint cans and pour it in. Then set about dealing with the battery.

But I've been confronted with this part of me that is part coward, part hedonist, part magical-thinker. This part of me that just doesn't want to be disturbed, not even when the information will save me later on. I see the same thing in all of my friends. I mean, this is *universal*. We don't want to have a look under the hood. We don't want to know what we desperately need to know. This is not a good quality. It is *not* our friend.

I do it in relationship. I don't want to ask Stasi how things are going, don't want the discomfort of what she might have to say. I don't want to give up the book I'm reading. I mean, this could take hours. So I let it go until it becomes a major issue.

Whether it's the oil level in my truck or an old wound that's lingering down there under the surface in my heart, I don't want the information that I already sense could be bad, don't want the disruption it brings. I'd rather avoid it altogether. Until my car shuts down a hundred miles from home, or I find myself deep into an addiction I know is rooted in unhealed pain.

Dear friends, this may be one of the essential differences between those who experience God and the life he offers, and those who don't.

Be willing to take a look. And to deal with whatever you find there. For these are the things that stand between us and God, or between us and others. We don't want to let them rule our lives for another ten or twenty years.

With you in the love of God,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'John' in a cursive, flowing style.

John