

EDITOR'S ETC.

BY DEAN MERRILL



I am always surprised at my storehouse of reasons *not* to get involved with someone else's need.

Twice each workday I drive an 11-mile stretch of Interstate 684—a busy, six-lane highway. It's not unusual, especially now in the cold weather, to see two, three, even four cars a day pulled off to the side with some kind of mechanical trouble. I'm a grown man who at least knows how to change a tire or un-flood a carburetor. So why don't I stop and help?

Excuse No. 1: Time. *I really need to get straight to my desk today.* Of course, the stalled person needs to get somewhere, too.

Excuse No. 2: Inconvenience. *I'm in the center lane, and I wouldn't want to get clipped moving over to the shoulder to stop.* When my exit comes up, however, I'll maneuver quite nicely.

Excuse No. 3: Danger. *What if there's nothing wrong with that guy's car, and he's just waiting to mug some Good Samaritan?* But it is broad daylight, and I, being a person of more-than-average height, am not a likely target.

Excuse No. 4: Inattention. *Ooops, I*

didn't see him soon enough. Too bad—maybe next time.

One snowy day last winter, after passing three cars with upraised hoods, I said to myself, *O.K.—next time I'm definitely going to stop and help.* Sure enough, within two miles was a brown Plymouth off to the side, a woman sitting at the wheel.

I pulled over, jumped out, and ran back. "Got a problem?" I asked above the roar of the 18-wheelers splashing past.

"Yes," she said. "But the state trooper was here about five minutes ago, and he's already radioed for a tow truck. Thanks anyway."

Excuse No. 5: *Let the officials handle these problems; that's what they're paid for. Volunteers just get in the way.*

(I told you I had a fertile mind for getting off the hook.)

It's harder these days, with all our elaborate systems, to hang onto the importance of putting God's love in visible form. Whether along the highway or in an office, at church, or anywhere else we associate with people, it is so easy to say, "Let somebody else help. Someone will surely take care of that." When in fact, the formal systems have been

created *because* too many of us declined to reach out.

We who live in metropolitan areas are especially prone to beg off. We look at all the people in the street, in the church foyer, on the downtown sidewalk, in the shopping mall—and assume there *has* to be a helping hand among those masses, doesn't there?

Meanwhile, the New Testament's apostle of action goes on quietly insisting, "Anyone . . . who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17).

A man went with his Quaker friend to church one Sunday. Everyone sat silently, according to Quaker custom, for quite a while, until the visitor leaned over to his friend and whispered, "When does the service start?"

"The service starts," came the reply, "when the meeting is over."

Christian service is simple response by those who have had an encounter with God. All it takes is an eye to see the need and a mind to override the excuses.

Dean Merrill

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