

# Locked Doors and Open Hearts

Nothing good ever happens after midnight." I heard that line more than once as a teenager while debating curfews, and maybe you did, too.

Decades later, it came back to me in a flash last New Year's Eve. Actually, it was more like 12:30 a.m. when the phone rang. My wife and I were already sound asleep. Our twin daughters, age 21, were out with friends from church celebrating the arrival of 1997.

Through my sleepiness I heard Tricia say, "Dad, uh, I have a problem. I stopped for gas at this all-night convenience store—and I locked the keys inside the car. I know this is really stupid—I'm terribly sorry—but the engine is still running! Can you bring me another key?"

I was not a happy camper as I crawled out of bed, pulled on my jeans, found a spare key, and drove across town to the 7-Eleven. I kept vacillating inside my head, from thoughts of *I'm going to kill this kid . . . to Okay, how does a responsible father control his irritation in these circumstances?*

As I rolled up to the store, she came walking out with a sheepish look on her face. "I'm really sorry, Dad," she said once again. "Are you mad at me?" I handed her the key and said as little as possible. . . .

The rest of the winter passed. Then one evening in March, the telephone rang at our home. A young woman's voice asked for Tricia Merrill.

"She's away at college in California," my wife replied. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"Oh . . . well, I guess not," came the shy

reply. "I just wanted to tell her something."

"I can give you her phone number and address if you like," my wife replied.

"What's the situation?"

"Well, she came in the convenience store where I was working last New Year's Eve. We started talking about my life and stuff—and she ended up giving me a New Testament. I just wanted to tell her that the last couple of months have really been a mess for me, and I don't know how I would have ever made it without that Bible. It's been a lifesaver for all I've been going through."

My wife encouraged her, told her how to reach our daughter, and then said good-bye.

*Lord, forgive me. I'm sorry for thinking ill of my daughter's carelessness, when in fact she was putting the almighty Word of God to work in a troubled young person's life that night. Your ways are indeed higher than our ways, and your Word is still the power of God unto salvation.*

Apparently, some good things DO happen after midnight.

Cordially,



# The Rest of the Story

Last issue of this newsletter I told you how my daughter, locked out of her car, had roused me out of bed at 12:30 a.m. to bring her a key—but how she had also redeemed herself (a little) by using the wait time to give a New Testament to a troubled convenience-store clerk. The clerk ended up calling us three months later to say thanks for helping her cope with a difficult season in her life.

Here's what happened next:

Several months later, the phone rang again. "Hi, it's Lori—remember me?" a voice said. "Well, since we talked last, I've been going to this church and meeting with the pastor. I've really decided to follow the Lord, and this weekend I'm being baptized . . . Um, I was just wondering if you guys would like to come."

Would we!

On the appointed morning, several of our family members showed up at the sanctuary to meet a medium-height, thirty-something brunette with a big smile on her face. It was quickly apparent that the whole congregation had gotten to know her and appreciate her commitment to Christ. A girlhood friend from Michigan had even made the long trip out to Colorado to share this special occasion.

In fact, when the time came in the service for Lori's declaration of faith, she had prepared a written script. Afraid of losing her emotions, she had her friend read the paper instead: how the two of them had grown up in the church but had rejected it as teenagers . . . how they used to mock Christianity to one another . . . how the friend had recently returned to faith in Christ but had been afraid to let Lori know—until the news tumbled out that Lori had experienced the same life change in almost the

same month. Now they were best friends again, and serving the same Lord.

Soon the pastor said, "Lori, I understand the person who gave you that Bible on New Year's Eve is here in our service today. Would you please have her stand?" She motioned to my daughter, who shyly rose to her feet.

The baptism then proceeded. Joy and a few tears spread throughout the pews. At the end of the service, Lori stood beside her minister at the church door to shake hands with each worshiper and receive congratulations.

When my daughter came along, the two embraced in a long hug. "Thanks so much," Lori said. And then came the sentence that encapsulated the whole wonderful encounter: "Don't ever stop giving out Bibles. It saved my life."

If we truly believe that the Word of God is the Sword of the Spirit, able to penetrate the deepest hurts and needs of the human heart, we must forever be willing to pull it out of its sheath and turn it loose. Huge numbers of people are stumbling through life without the help that awaits within the Bible's pages. They would be grateful—eternally grateful—if we put them in touch.

*Dean*