

A Lesson Learned From Billows of Black Smoke

Written by Bill Perkins

You wouldn't think something as insignificant as a gear-shift indicator could spell disaster for a car. But it could. I used to own an Oldsmobile Cutlass that worked great except for the gear-shift indicator. When the indicator was on N the car was really in second gear instead of drive.

I Forgot To Tell Kip

One day I loaned the car to a friend and forgot to mention that one flaw. I was mowing the yard when Cindy, my wife, told me Kip wanted me on the phone. "He sounds upset," she said. So I ran inside and picked up the phone. "Bill," Kip said, breathing hard, "Billows of black smoke are coming out of the car's engine. And it's making a loud banging noise."

"What happened?" I asked.

"I don't know. I was just driving down the freeway. I wasn't going any faster than you normally drive."

Actually, Kip hadn't done anything wrong. My car just couldn't handle traveling at 65 MPH in second gear.

Slow Down or Shift Gears

I thought about the Olds one day when I visited a friend in the hospital. Jim classified his trip to the hospital as a precaution. In truth, he had suffered a minor heart attack.

For almost ten years Jim had been racing through life at 65 MPH while in second gear. He said he had to live at full speed in order to build up his business.

I wondered how big Jim's business would have to get before he would shift gears. He already had one of the most successful financial planning companies in the state. He lived in a custom home on a wooded lot in an affluent suburb. Every year he bought a new luxury car.

Somehow, the baby blue hospital robe made him seem more human. The black bags under his eyes contained a sermon about the vices of workaholism. So did the heart monitor attached to his chest. I felt sorry for Jim and hoped he would listen.

"Jim, you have to slow down," I urged.

"I can't," he said. "But I will start working out and watching what I eat."

"You're killing yourself," I said.

“I know. But it’ll only be for awhile. Then I can slow down.”

God Can Be Trusted to Provide

As I left Jim I thought about Psalm 127:2 where the Psalmist says, “In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat- for he gives to his beloved, even in their sleep.”

I realize there are times when we all have to put in extra hours. But when work deprives us of time with God and our families and strips away our health—we need to slow down. Doing so demands a dose of faith--a belief that God will multiply the results of our efforts when, in obedience to him, we work fewer hours. Remember, God worked six days and then rested on the Seventh. He commanded the Israelites to follow his example and promised to reward their obedience. The same God will reward our obedience when it flows from faith.