

FEARING MY FATHER

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Proverbs 1:7

Getting a driver's license did not seem like such a big deal when I was sixteen. It might have been that I was not sure if my physical handicap would allow me to drive a car or perhaps it was the fact that our family did not own a car that would excite a teenager to drive.

However, by the time my seventeenth birthday arrived, we discovered that hand controls for a car were relatively inexpensive and our family had a car that was more to my liking. As I recall it was a 1965 Ford Galaxy. It was a large automobile, certainly worthy of the classification of "family car." Yet, it possessed a 390 cubic inch engine with enough power to excite any kid who wanted to impress both guys and girls.

In the fall of 1967, my Junior year at Mapleton High School, I enrolled in Driver's Education. It was a special arrangement where I would spend class time with the other students, but one or two days a week, Mr. Weigand the teacher, would come to my house for one-on-one driving lessons.

Since the school car did not have hand controls, we had to use our Ford. Mr. Weigand must have been a trusting sort. The regular Driver's Ed vehicles came equipped with a brake pedal for his use from the passenger's seat. He did not have that luxury when I drove. Nevertheless, he allowed me to maneuver the normal obstacles, including a few excursions down Interstate 25 through Denver.

Passing the Driver's Test and getting my licenses was not difficult. Mr. Weigand's classroom technique and driving instruction had me adequately prepared. The actual driving portion of the test consisted of little more than circling a block next to the DMV office which was a series of school zones. I demonstrated that I could handle a car at the required 20 miles per hour.

With a fresh Driver's License in my wallet, I was ready for any challenge. Being a little less confident, my parents did not allow me to start making cross country road trips immediately.

My first opportunity to drive, without parental supervision, came on a Wednesday night. After the church service, my father offered to allow me to drive home, stopping to deliver my friend Jim Grundy on the way. Jim and I climbed into the car while we tried to temper our excitement.

We were not very far from the church when one of us (I do not recall who made the initial suggestion) had the idea that a girl in the youth group needed to see us that night. The motion was quickly seconded and we turned from our course and headed south on Washington street.

It is hard to remember if we were more excited about seeing this cute girl or about being in a car without our parents. Regardless of the reason, we were enjoying our new found freedom. As we pulled up to a traffic light at 84th Street and Washington we scanned in all directions to see who was being impressed by our presence.

Jim was the first to notice the car that pulled alongside on the passenger side. It was my father, taking some kids home from church. He had probably spotted us several blocks earlier and took advantage of the red light to get our attention.

We were both in shock for a instant and then Jim dutifully rolled down the car window. My father and I did not exchange greetings. He looked at me for a minute and then calmly said, "I'll see you when you get home."

I knew what those words meant and I was scared. My fear was caused by the fact that I was afraid of my father. My Dad was a large man, over six-feet tall and exceeding two hundred pounds. As a small handicapped kid, he was an imposing physical specimen.

My father was also a very confident man and when he spoke, everyone listened. He commanded respect, by his size and his demeanor. It was not out of place for me to be afraid.

However, I was not afraid that my father would hurt me. To the contrary, I do not remember my father ever striking me. I am sure I was on the receiving end of a few spankings but they were not the kind that caused physical or emotional damage and stuck in my memory. There is no way my father would ever harm me.

I also know from experience that my father has always done the best thing for me in every circumstance. He has gone to great lengths and enormous sacrifice to give me the best. Yet, while sitting next to my friend Jim Grundy on the front seat of our Ford, I was afraid.

I was afraid that I had disappointed my Dad. Even as a seventeen-year-old kid, I was aware of the greatness of this man and I did not want to disappoint him. Many things in my life have been motivated by this fear. It has caused me to do a number of good things when I was tempted to make a lesser choice.

This is the same kind of fear that we must learn in our relationship with God. This is the beginning of true wisdom because it leads us to obedience. Although our relationship has changed in the past thirty years, I still possess this fear of my father. I hope it never changes, even after he is gone. I pray that I can pass it on to my sons.