

STARING DEATH IN THE FACE

*Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.*
(Proverbs 3:7)

During my seminary days I had the unique opportunity of living next door to my pastor. He was my neighbor first. We were both students living in seminary apartments. Fuller Hall was a first-class apartment building; or at least it had been about a hundred years ago.

Our two apartments were located in the corner of the basement, isolated from the remainder of the building. Fred latched on to us the day we moved in. He helped carry our stuff into the apartment and then he assisted me in maneuvering the campus in my wheelchair.

Because of his servant heart and our developing friendship, we became interested in the church he served as pastor. It was a small congregation on the edge of Louisville; a typical seminary pastorate. We joined the church and immediately began to serve alongside Fred and his wife Valeria.

One afternoon, Fred knocked on our door. He had been called to make an emergency hospital visit to one of the church members and he wanted me to go along. We hopped into Fred's little yellow car and drove to downtown Louisville.

I have never enjoyed hospital visitation. Showing compassion is not one of my strengths. I really do care about people when they suffer but it is difficult for me to express those feelings.

The family we needed to visit was in the lobby, waiting for a report from the doctor. We exchanged greetings, expressed our concern, shared in prayer, and joined the wait.

A woman who was causing a commotion in the hospital lobby caught my attention. She was bouncing from person to person, requesting money for a pay phone. I watched for a few minutes and then started toward her in order to provide a quarter. Before I arrived, someone else gave her the change. She walked over to the phone and everything quieted down to normal.

The doctor finally arrived with good news for the anxious family. We shared a short prayer of thanksgiving, excused ourselves and walked to the car. We had successfully accomplished our ministry objective. Like experienced pastors, we had comforted the family, blessed the Lord, and left everyone with renewed faith. Even though we were still students, we sensed that we had a real grip on ministry.

As Fred maneuvered through the parking lot, he turned into the driveway that led to the street and immediately slammed on the brakes. The boisterous woman from the hospital lobby had jumped in front of our car, waving her arms for us to stop.

Relieved that his reactions were quick, Fred got out of the car to speak with the woman. She was even more excited than she had been earlier inside the hospital. Sorting through her ramblings, Fred determined that her greatest need was a ride home.

He opened the door to allow her to climb into the back seat. From the front passenger seat, I immediately smelled that her immediate problem was alcohol. After a few moments, the woman was finally settled into the seat, holding a large leather bag in her lap.

The woman provided directions to her house and Fred, being somewhat familiar with the city, drove toward her destination. The woman, sitting in the back seat, continued her aimless conversation. We were still several blocks away from her house when she began to talk as if life were not worth living. Fred and I both thought that she was contemplating suicide.

As her words became more serious, we tried to reason with her but she was not interested in listening to a couple of inexperienced seminary students. As her words revealed more and more despair with her life, she began to rummage through the large bag

in her lap. We were convinced that she was going to pull a gun from the bag which meant our future was also in question.

I quickly positioned my crutches between the front seats so I had a clear shot to hit her hand the moment I saw a gun. Fred was reaching underneath the driver's seat for a tire tool. We thought we were ready.

Suddenly, without any warning, the woman shouted "Stop!" We did. Fred slammed on the brakes and I tried to crawl underneath the seat. We were convinced that life was over.

As it turns out, the woman did not pull a gun from the bag. Rather, she did not want us to miss the turn to go to her house. "Stop" was her way of giving directions. Fortunately, the house was only a block further. Fred pulled into the driveway, helped her out of the car, and we sped away.

Ministry can be frightening. Or, at least our feeble attempt at ministry scared us. Hopefully this woman's despair was eased by sobering up. It was a very sobering experience for two seminary students who thought they were ready to handle any problem the world had to offer.