

The Flat Tire

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My tire had a staple in it. Of all times for this to happen -- a flat tire. But when is a good time for a flat tire? Not when you are wearing a suit and you have been traveling for nearly five hours and, adding to this bleak picture, nightfall is approaching. Wait; did I mention that I was on a country road? Okay, now you have the picture.

There was only one thing to do: call AAA. Yeah, right. The cell phone I bought for security and protection in moments like this isn't in range to call anyone. "No Service" it says. No kidding! I sat for a few minutes moaning and complaining. It's a male thing. Then I began emptying my trunk so that I could get at the tire and tools needed to get the job done. I carry a large plastic container filled with what I call "just-in-case-stuff." When I am training or speaking, I love to have props with me. I hate leaving anything home so I bring everything ...just in case. Cars buzz by me. A few beep sarcastically. I hear the horn saying "ha ha!" I say, "You'll get yours!" Darkness begins to settle in. It's becoming a bit difficult to see. The tire is on the passenger side, thank God, away from all the traffic, but making it difficult to benefit from the headlights of passing cars.

Suddenly a car pulls off the road behind me. In the blinding light I see a male figure approaching me. "Hey, do you need any help?" "Well, it certainly isn't easy doing this with a white dress shirt and suit on," I said. Then he steps into the light. I literally was frightened. This young guy was dressed in black. Nearly everything imaginable was pierced and tattooed. His hair was cropped and poorly cut. He had leather bracelets with spikes on each wrist. "How about I give you a hand?" he said. "Well, I don't know . . . I think I can . . . " "Come on, it will only take me a few minutes." He took right over.

While watching him I happened to look back at his car and noticed for the first time someone sitting in the passenger seat. That concerned me. I suddenly felt out numbered. Thoughts of car jackings or robberies flashed through my mind. I really just wanted to get this over and survive it. Then, without warning, it began to pour. The night sky had hidden the approaching clouds. It hit like a waterfall and made it impossible to finish

the tire change. "Look, my friend, just stop what you're doing. I appreciate all your help. You better get going. I'll finish after the rain stops," I said. "Let me help you put your stuff back in the trunk. It will get ruined," he insisted. "Then get in my car. We'll wait with you," he insisted. "No, really. I'll take care of everything," I said. "You can't get in your car with the jack up like that. It will fall. Come on. Get in," he said as he grabbed my arm and pulled me toward the car.

Crack! Boom! Lightning and thunder roared like a freight train. I literally jumped in his car. "Oh, God, protect me!" I thought to myself. Wet and tired I settled into the back seat. Suddenly a small frail voice came from the front seat of the car. "Are you all right?" she said as she turned around to face me. "Yes, I am," I replied with much relief seeing the old woman there. It must be his Mom. "My name is Beatrice and this is my neighbor Jeff," she said. "He insisted on stopping when he saw you struggling with the tire." "I am grateful for his help," I said. "Me, too!" she said with a laugh. "Jeff takes me to visit my husband. We had to place him in a nursing home and it's about 30 minutes away from where we live. So, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, we have a date." She laughed and shook her head. "We're the remake of the Odd Couple," Jeff said as he joined in laughing." "Jeff, that's incredible what you do for her. I would never have guessed, well, ah, you know I . . ." I stumbled with the words.

"I know. People who look like me don't do nice things," he said. Silence. I really felt uncomfortable. I never believed that I judged people by the way they dressed. I was angry with myself for being so stupid. "Jeff is a great kid. I'm not the only one he helps. He's a volunteer at our church. He also works with the kids in the learning center at the low income housing unit in our town," said Beatrice. "I'm a tutor" Jeff said quietly as he stared at my car. Silence again played a part now in a moment of reflection rather than the uncomfortable feeling that I had insulted someone. He was right. What he wore on the outside was a reflection of the world as he saw it. What he wore on the inside was the spirit of giving, caring and loving the world he wanted to see. The rain stopped and Jeff and I changed the tire. I tried to offer him money and of course he refused it. As we shook hands I began to apologize for my stupidity.

He said, "I experience that same reaction often. I actually thought about changing the way I look. But then I saw this as an opportunity to make a point. So I'll leave you with the same question I ask everyone who takes

time to know me. If Jesus returned tomorrow and walked among us again, would you recognize Him by what He wore or by what He did? "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'" 1Samuel 16:7