

## Lessons from a hospital lavatory

I was really scared. I visited a church member at the Los Angeles County-University of Southern California Medical Center (you see a picture of that hospital if you watch the soap, General Hospital). Wanting to practice good hygiene, I intended to wash my hands after praying with the patient. I entered a public restroom on the ground floor at the back of the huge building. At the time, unrest in Los Angeles kept everyone edgy. Friends had been held up at gunpoint and others beaten.

My first sight on entering the restroom was a huge guy in a muscle shirt. Tattoos covered his arms. The hulk's giant fingers held a cigarette. He looked as if he could dismantle the entire medical facility with his bare hands. That goliath could have shredded me like a paper towel. A young man, more my size, leaned against one of the stall doors. I assumed him to be the giant's accomplice. He, too, was intensely inhaling.

Instantly, I began planning a two-part strategy. First, I felt I needed to move quickly. Second, I thought it best to be cordial. I made the friendliest comment my mind could muster. "There are not many places where you can smoke in public buildings anymore," I said weakly, glancing toward the door.

For the first time since I entered "his turf," he looked at me directly and then said, "No, man, my dad's out there and I don't want him to catch me smoking." Sure enough, a little later, I saw him walking with his dad and his friend. And I didn't rat on him. I've been afraid since under different circumstances. I've also stereotyped people because of their appearance. I pray that I can quit doing both.

**"He who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law," Romans 12:8 NIV.**