

Dear Friends in Christ:

Working on old broken down cars can teach us some things about God.

Right now my flat head red sled (2010 Mitsubishi with 227000 miles) is on the road. Earlier this Spring I should have junked it.

People who love old cars but do not have their own metal fabrication shop tend to finally junk the cars when the critical suspension components rust out. In my case, the subframe rusted out so that the arm that holds the front left wheel in place was flopping around every time I hit a bump. The car had been doing this since last Fall, but when Miss Karla would point it out on road trips I would pretend to be deaf. "I'm not hearing anything." I would explain. Not surprisingly, she believed me. She did not believe the car was ok. She believed I was deaf as a post.

By late Spring the clanking and rattling on the car got so bad I needed a new subframe which, if purchased new and done by a shop is more than the car is worth. I resolved to junk it, but Miss Karla was away in Ohio by then and I did not have sufficient adult supervision. I started looking for a new or used subframe. I found one at a wrecking yard on Liberty Avenue. Ian and I went in and I spent \$125 and dragged it home.

This was the first of many things I had to buy. Mechanics talk about a parts cannon, and I had to load and fire the parts cannon many times. I ended buying new control arms (what holds the wheels in place) new stabilizer bar links, two new motor mounts, c-clamps to hold my exhaust flange together after I broke it, a new ground cable and a new evaporation purge solenoid. I also got the brake rotors turned in Queens which now costs as much as new rotors.

All of this was in addition to laying under the car for hours, and dragging, Miss Karla, Ian, and Rafael, my neighbor into the lifting, prying and bolt fitting operations. With the help of a cargo ratchet strap I got from Roger D. many years ago, and an electric winch I borrowed from Terrence J., two jack stands, a floor jack, and a building jack, assorted crow bars, and a spud bar I finally got the car back together. By mid July I had it riding smooth and running fairly well except for dying at the occasional stoplight. By late July I had it running well. Then I drove it to Barney's Hardware and came out to a dead battery. \$160 later I told myself, "You should have junked it in May." And I was correct.

"But," I interrupted myself, "You can still get another winter out of it."

I have to think that God has much the same internal discussion. God should have pulled the plug on an old sinner like me years ago, but He can still get another winter or two out of me. I imagine that if you are honest, you are in the same boat. Why God would want to get another winter or summer out of us remains a mystery even deeper than why I would put \$600 into a car that ought to be scrapped. We under appreciate God's grace when we see it only in terms of saving a wretch like me. The fact that God keeps us around and finds useful things for us to do is grace as well. God doesn't need us, he wants us. The greatest gift from God remains life, light, and salvation. The second greatest gift God gives us is to allow us to labor in his vineyard today and tomorrow and who knows how long after that? Can you still tell the story? Can you still sing God's praises, Can you still get out to worship? Can you still use a telephone to reach out to someone who is hurting or alone? Can you still give of your time, talent, and treasure? Can you still pray. As long as God has chosen to keep you around—not because he needs you but because he wants you...As long as God has chosen to keep you around, you might as well make yourself useful.

By the way, does anybody have a number for Earl Scheib?

Yours in Christ,

John S. McKenzie