

The Bus Stop

A Modern Parable

By David L. Miner

The taxi was traveling way over the speed limit, so when it hit the puddle in front of me I was drenched. My raincoat caught most of the road water, but my face and hair became instantly wet and oily.

"Here." The man next to me on the bus stop bench chuckled as he offered me a napkin from his coat pocket. "I always keep a supply of these for just such an occasion."

"Thanks," I muttered, cutting off the comment I really wanted to say. Life was not going well for me lately, and the unwanted shower seemed right in line with my luck lately.

As I tried to clean my glasses, I noticed him still chuckling. Ignoring him, I leaned against the back of the bus stop shelter. Shelter? This is a hard bench in a shelter with a back and two sides made out of Plexiglas, I thought to myself. Naturally, the side left unprotected would be the street side.

"I doubt the City Planners left open the side facing the road just so you would experience an unplanned baptism." The man was smiling at me just like he could read my mind.

"I wouldn't bet on it," I shot back, just a little more hostile than I intended. "I can hear them now, just whooping it up back at City Hall, wondering how many city residents will get drenched at the many bus stops today."

"Over the years, I have seen that difficulties are seldom a result of life conspiring against you. In fact, difficulties are usually a result of one's own choices rather than the evil plans of an enemy." The man seemed to have the air of a professor. I felt like I was expected to learn something...

Just then, a pickup truck sped past, going even faster than the taxi a few minutes ago. Before I could do anything to avoid it, my face and glasses were soaking wet again, and this time the napkin I had used was also drenched.

The man gently laughed aloud. His laugh had a soft but booming sound, yet with almost a tinkling to his laugh. It sounded really weird, yet comforting at the same time. Without a word, he handed over another napkin.

"Welcome to life!" I sputtered.

"No, welcome to the bus stop," he countered, still smiling.

"Yeah, I guess you don't get splashed unless you are at the bus stop." I was still sputtering.

"Really? You only get splashed while you are at the bus stop? Life has no struggles or setbacks?" His questioning seemed a little strange.

"No, I guess I get splashed in life, too. In fact, I seem to get splashed a lot lately, and I am almost never at the bus stop." I noticed he was looking straight at me again.

"Actually, you have spent your entire life at the bus stop. But your short trips into what you call *life* seem to occupy your entire attention." The old man was still looking at me in that peculiar manner, straight into my eyes, unflinching. This was not at all how people talk at the bus stop. Very little eye contact and only the weather - that is the rule at the bus stop!

Okay, now the old man was really beginning to spook me.

"Look," I returned, beginning to feel exasperated and a little spooked. "I don't know you and you don't know me. I am 36 years old and I have been at the bus stop only six times in my life, and those were only this week. My car is in the shop getting repaired after a punk stole it and took it for a joy ride last week. I think they are still trying to get it loose from the tree he hit. So don't try to tell me I have been at the bus stop all my life." I turned from his gaze and looked straight ahead with obvious resolve in my bearing. As far as I was concerned, the conversation was over.

The old man paused for a few seconds, still looking at me. Then he, too, looked straight ahead. Out of the corner of my eye, I thought I saw a flash of a smile again.

Several minutes of silence followed, as we both watched the traffic stream past.

"Have you noticed that it took a small tragedy in order for you to think of the bus stop? ...to realize just how important the bus stop can be in your life?" The old man still looking straight ahead, but I felt his eyes on me just the same.

"It was no small tragedy! I saved up my whole life for that car. Have you ever driven a Corvette? I'll bet you haven't! A Corvette is like no other car in the world. And this year's model is the most awesome Corvette ever! I picked it up from the dealer two weeks ago. I drove it one week and then this jerk stole it and wrecked it. He ruined my life!" Now I was angry. This old guy had really torqued me off. What does he know about life, anyway? Especially *my* life!

"You consider yourself a Believer, don't you?" I jerked at his question, and still felt his eyes on me even though I refused to look at him.

"What do you mean?" His question caught me off guard. Besides, if he meant what I thought he meant, it was none of his business.

"I mean, you consider yourself a Christian, right? A follower of Jesus?" This old man just wouldn't give up!

"Yes," I responded sharply. "And what does that have to do with anything? Are you the spiritual police checking up on me?" This time I looked right in his eyes.

The old man paused for a few seconds, and mumbled something that sounded like, "In a manner of speaking." He rotated in my direction, looking right at me, intentionally squaring off with me.

"Following Jesus has everything to do with you being here at the bus stop today. You have been here a long time, but you have grown up thinking only of what you call *life*. Every believer is just waiting at the bus stop. Everything *e/se* may keep your attention, but the bus stop is what is important. You may live in a house that you THINK of as home, but a believer is always sitting at the bus stop waiting to really go home. You may sit in your Corvette thinking you are going places, but the only place that is really important is going home, and you can only get there from here at the bus stop.

"Even fifty years ago," the old man continued, "Believers were very aware of going home. We wrote hundreds of songs and hymns about going home. Now, believers are more aware of life *here* and they don't seem to think of the bus stop or look toward going home. If they could only once again grasp what I have waiting for them when they get home, I think they would think about going home a lot more. If they truly understood and believed what I have in store for them when they finally get *THERE*, they wouldn't care so much about the things they gather *HERE*."

There was an awkward pause, and then he went on. "If you only knew the traveling you will be doing once you get home, you would forget even a Corvette."

I turned away, needing to hide the look on my face. I didn't want to be sitting so close to him and have my expression indicate that I thought he was insane. For a few seconds, I composed my face and prepared my thoughts.

Still looking away, I patiently tried to sound neutral. "So Believers are just waiting to go to their heavenly home, and they get there by taking the bus at the bus stop. Okay, I get that. And we tend to allow the details and the hassles of life to get in the way of thinking about going to heaven. Guilty. But what do *you* know about life *today*? *You* grew up when life in America was different, easier, less complicated. What do *you* know about juggling all the difficulties and demands of life, the problems you have to survive and endure, the setbacks and failures you experience at the hands of others, all the while trying to balance a family and a career? What do *you* know about..."

I turned to him, full of the frustration of my life and just winding up. I was about to really tell him off.

But he wasn't there.

One second he was sitting there with that smile on his face and that twinkle in his eye. The next second, he was gone.

After several more seconds, I realized I wasn't breathing. I gasped, filling my lungs, then looked around. There was no old man in sight in any direction. *Had I imagined the entire thing?* Yet he had seemed so real. I felt sheepish, not knowing what in the world to do, and hoping that no one had seen me talking to an empty bus stop.

And then a thought hit me so powerfully that I was stunned and I almost fell off the bench. I gasped again.

"*Oh My God!*" The words escaped my mouth before I could stop them, before I could even think about them.

"**Exactly**," came the soft but wonderful response from somewhere near but at the same time quite distant. "If only my people would get a better grasp of the fact that they are just passing through life on their way home..." His voice was even further away, leaving a strange sense of loneliness in the bus stop, but an even stranger sense of expectancy and joy in my heart.

"Maybe you can come back here when you are driving your Corvette. Maybe we can sit and talk some more while we wait for the bus to take you home. I would like that." The old man's voice seemed to echo in the bus stop, taking my breath away again but leaving me with a sense of hope and excitement.

And I realized that I would think about taking the bus home more than I have ever before...