

The Flight of the Falcon

*A Report by the Always-Right Reverend
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When I was a kid, one of my ultimate goals in life was to learn how to drive. It was that way with most kids I knew when I was growing up and, judging from my experience now with my own offspring, I guess it is still that way. There is something about being able to direct the path of a few thousand pounds of metal that instills a feeling of accomplishment into the juvenile psyche.

And so it was that, at the ripe age of nine or so, I began to get the urge to drive something. I did have certain advantages afforded to me that not many kids have today. I had about five hundred acres of land with dirt roads and no traffic. When standing on our front porch, and being careful not to fall through the holes in the rotted wood, one could see two other houses. Only one of those was occupied. About the only thing that has changed there in the last fifty years is that now the other one is occupied, but the one I grew up in is not.

I don't remember how old I was the first time I attempted to drive a vehicle. But Dad had a good tool for instruction. We had, for purposes of tending to the land and hauling the blueberries, an old Dodge Power Wagon. It was a monstrous machine and besides, just the name was inspiring. It had huge tires, big wheels, and had been used to grind the enemy to powder in World War II. Well, at least that's what it had been built for. It was green, and the black bumper was made in one piece from the deck of an aircraft carrier. It was no small trick for a small boy to manage to climb up into the cab. But it was perfect for learning to drive – at least; that's the way Dad saw it.

It would go just about anywhere, and didn't care exactly what was in the way. It had a winch on the front, wound with wire that could have been used to moor the aforementioned aircraft carrier. I remember Dad getting the thing mired a couple of times, and simply running out the winch, locking the wire around a boulder or a large tree, and simply pulling the vehicle out of its predicament. This was not one of those modern electric wimpy winches. This one had a drive shaft that ran right off the transmission, so you were actually driving the winch. One of the saddest days of my life was when I heard they had sold that machine. But I digress.

So Dad decided that I would learn to drive by piloting the Power Wagon. Just getting it started was a real trip, because the spring-loaded, foot-operated starter lever was right above the gas pedal, and it was quite a reach for a boy's foot to push both things at the same time so the monster would start. After starting, we had to determine which gear to use. The machine had two ranges, five gears in each range, and four-wheel drive to boot. Plus, of course, the lever for the winch. All of this was enough to confuse a Remonstrant reading Beza.

The top speed of the unit, in the gear of choice for a first-timer, was about minus three miles per hour. That was still fast enough, however, that the piston slap kept time with a young man's heart. After getting myself arranged on the front edge of the seat, getting the beast to start, and engaging the engine to the drive train, we began crawling out the mountain road. The

thing I remember about that trip was that I could not figure out how to keep the vehicle from wandering all over the road, and then having to over-correct to get back on track. It was then that Dad offered a bit of wisdom that has stayed with me from that time forward – “Don’t get hung up looking at what is right in front of you. Pick a point in the distance and gently steer for it.” From the time I started applying that simple principle, things got a lot better.

Some things are worth remembering, and that is one of them. There have been many times that I have found myself becoming distraught over the things that are right in front of me, or becoming too bogged down in the immediate details. It helps to look ahead a little and envision the goal.

After some trips in the Power Wagon, and familiarity with the road course, I graduated to a Model A Ford that had been my grandfather’s auto of choice. Of course Grampy only went to town about once a year for supplies, so the automobile was in pretty good shape. The Ford was a limousine compared to the Power Wagon, but had its own set of limitations. That, too, was a wonderful machine.

About that time, our family must have come into some money, or our credit got better, because we traded in our 1955 Ford for a wonderful little gizmo called a Ford Falcon. We, of course, had not purchased this modern miracle new, but it was new to us. If any of you remember these vehicles, you can perhaps imagine what the car looked like with Ma, Dad, and three kids in it. Capacity was exceeded when the whole family was going somewhere. It had a standard transmission, and was really a nice little auto.

One day, Dad and I were on our way home. By this time, I considered myself an experienced wheelsman, even though I wasn’t over 13 years old at the time. I had been driving the other vehicles quite a while now and was doing fine in the woods. As we turned off the main “highway” onto the road that would take us home, Dad stopped the car, looked over at me, and said, “Well, do you want to drive?”

What a silly question!!! Of course I wanted to drive. I was an expert in a Power Wagon and an expert in a Model A. Why wouldn’t I be an expert in this little Falcon? Dad got out and walked around. I slid over into the driver’s seat. I put the transmission in first gear, gently let out on the clutch, and we began to scoot. I mean really scoot. It had never been like this before. This was a real blast – until we got to the house.

As we approached the driveway, which made a right angle from the road and stopped at the shop building, Dad looked over and said, “You might want to slow down a little.” I took my foot off the gas and let it glide. If this had been the Power Wagon, it would have come to a stop. If it had been the Model A, it would have stalled completely. But the Falcon kept right on going. When I reached the driveway, I made what I thought was the appropriate maneuver for a right turn – except at the speed we were going, I only made about half a right turn. We cleared the shop building by about six inches on the right, cleared the old Maple tree by about a foot on the left, and went airborne over the timbers that marked the side of the driveway. I was in complete control. It was a good thing we were in the air, because we flew over the granite precipice that sits beside the driveway, and came to rest at the edge of the blueberry field in the

sweet fern. Please keep in mind that seat belts had not yet been invented, and we were more or less weightless. The only thing we were missing was Tang.

After the engine sputtered and gave up the ghost, the smoke cleared, and the seat cushions came to rest, Dad looked over calmly and said, “Where are we going?” I gave that famous answer that all kids have used since Adam asked Cain why he didn’t like his brother – “I don’t know.” Every time I hear my kids say that (and they still say it even though they’re supposedly grown), I think of Dad and that incident (except when I think of Darkey and the hayrake).

Sometimes we make judgments about things we don’t understand. Just because I can drive a Power Wagon doesn’t mean I can tell someone else how to drive his Falcon. And don’t ever think that the learning process stops so we can take it easy.

By the way, the Falcon recovered to fly again – but it didn’t fly with me in it for a while. I found that Power Wagons weren’t so bad after all, and that there is something to be said for taking it slow, and keeping your eyes on the goal. Oftentimes, in the ministry, while driving our Power Wagon, we see others flying by in their Falcon. We wonder why that couldn’t be us. Maybe because God owns the Power Wagon AND the Falcon, and knows which one suits us best. I believe God says that He set some in the church – they didn’t just decide where to be set. Had they done so, they might have ended up in the blueberry field.

Doc Trin