

Empathetic charity vs. cautious suspicion

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I had quite an unexpected adventure last week. Something happened which made me worry I might become the victim of a crime, but the reality was I was given the opportunity to become a good Samaritan.



Very late on Wednesday night, I was driving home along the quiet country lanes near my home after having dropped off one of the brothers who had attended our weekly brothers' small group meeting. I knew that my wife was still up and that she was waiting for me; with both of us having had quite a busy day, I was looking forward to getting home so that we could both hit the sack. In my van I was listening to a conversation on the radio while cruising along the empty tree-lined road and feeling quite peaceful, when I saw approaching me the flashing hazard lights of a black hatchback stationary in the opposite lane. The driver, a petite young woman, hailed me down. As I decelerated and lowered my window, I could see that she was quite upset. "Please help me," she implored. "I've run out of fuel and I've got no cash on me!" I immediately felt compelled to help this person in need. A split second later, however, the terrifying prospect of being carjacked dawned upon me.

Was this woman about to steal my phone, or my wallet, or even my vehicle?



I told the lady to hang on, and drove a few meters along the road to park on the side so that cars in either direction could pass us. I noticed in my rear-view mirror that two motorcyclists had also stopped behind me. Were they stopping in order to also help this stranded driver? Or were they her criminal accomplices, arriving on time in order to execute their well-rehearsed scam?

Before exiting my van I paid particular attention to ensure that my phone and wallet were safely in my pockets. I slowly disembarked from the driver's cabin and, after closing the driver's door, consciously locked the vehicle remotely with my key. I then turned to see that one of the motorcyclists was helping the female driver to push her small car over to the side of the road. I jogged over and put my shoulder into the corner of the vehicle to help push it into a safer position in the road. Once the left side of the vehicle was over the curb and resting on the grass, I joined the conference that was now forming to decide a plan of action. While still being conscious of the possibility that this was an elaborate set-up, I suspended my doubts and cautiously held onto the belief that this scenario was genuine.

I began by attempting to divert the driver's attention away from the urgency of the immediate situation. "I suppose this is a rather spooky place to break down, isn't it?" I was referring to the dark woods surrounding the road. "Where are you driving to?"

"I was driving home," she replied with a trembling voice. "I've been helping me sister move house all day long."

"Oh, really? Where did she move to?"

Her answer wasn't very intelligible. She simply pointed down the road and muttered something half-heartedly. Clearly, this woman was quite upset.

The motorcyclist and I then tried to come up with a plan with the driver. I offered to drive to a local fuel station to buy some fuel. We were wondering how best to fetch the fuel. Thankfully, the motorcyclist who had helped to push the car to one side reported the fact that he had a jerry can at home. I offered to pay for the fuel, but the stranded driver insisted that I pay using her debit card. Keen to show that I wanted to be held accountable, I asked the motorcyclist if he would come with me. He wasn't keen on coming in the van with me. Rather, he suggested that the lady come with me instead. Before I had the chance to disagree, the driver herself asserted that she wasn't going to accept a lift from a complete stranger. (And quite rightfully so, I thought to myself!)

At this point, the other motorcyclist joined our conversation, and I was pleased to see that she was also a woman. We decided that I would drive in my van, following the male motorcyclist who would drive ahead of me to a local fuel station that he knew would be open. (It was around midnight and most fuel stations would have been closed by this time.) I was entrusted with the car driver's debit card and she told us the PIN – which was incredibly brave of her to do. In this way, the motorcyclist and I would hold each

other accountable. The female motorcyclist was left behind as a guarantee of the other motorcyclist's return, and also to keep the female driver company. Before setting off, I sent a couple of ambiguous text messages to my wife, reporting my delay and promising to explain everything later. Thankfully her intuition was perceptively accurate.

Without drama, the motorcyclist and I were able to fetch some fuel and return to the thirsty vehicle. Just as we arrived, I became aware of the cold night air and noticed that the car's driver was not wearing a coat. Hopefully, I thought to myself, this woman would be able to start her car and conclude her journey home without getting too cold.

But something was wrong. Despite the delivery of just over 6 liters of fuel, the engine was not starting. The helpful motorcyclist seemed to know a thing or two about vehicles, as he asked a couple of questions which led to the conclusion that the car's battery was flat: As if one problem weren't enough!

By this point, the woman was becoming desperate. "Please, I don't care anymore, just drive me home and I'll leave the car here for the night." Her request was directed at me, and I had to admit I wasn't keen on giving up quite yet. I reported the fact that I had some jump leads in my van and that we could try jump starting the engine by connecting my van's battery to her car's battery. Losing hope, the woman hesitated to attempt the jump-start and repeated her wish for me to drive her home. I insisted, "Let's at least give this a go – it'll take no more than 10 minutes." Not only did I want to get home quickly, I didn't like the idea of driving an upset stranger home late at night, not unless it was absolutely necessary.



Sure enough, the jump leads did the trick and her car battery got the boost it needed to get the engine running. The woman threw her arms around the motorcyclist and then around me, thanking us for rescuing her. "Thank you, you're a hero," she exaggerated. "I'm sure great things will come to you for helping me tonight." I didn't entirely agree with her logic, but I wasn't going to begin arguing with her. Just being able to make a helpful difference was reward enough, and it was comforting to see the woman drive away quickly afterwards.

I thanked the two motorcyclists for their cooperation and drove off myself, keen to return home after this adventure. I realized that I didn't know the name of the driver I had helped to rescue, or the names of the charitable motorcyclists. Nevertheless, I felt privileged to have been able to make a positive difference to someone's life that night and thanked God for blessing the situation through me and the motorcyclists.

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