

## DUCKING AND WEAVING THROUGH LIFE

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**I'm a bit of a cyclist. I ride my bike to and from work as much as possible. This means riding on busy, main roads.**

**I'm sometimes asked if I feel safe doing this. My response is quite simply, "Yes." I have never, to my knowledge, had a near miss. I have never felt in any peril and I have never sensed that I would be better off travelling in a car.**

But my experience may not be as idyllic and carefree as it seems.

When I ride my bike on busy roads I need to adopt a certain attitude that often leaves me at odds with other road users. While it's foolish to be reckless, I ride only with a sense of what is ahead of me. There's no time to be concerned about what I might have left behind. This may mean aggressively forcing my way into traffic with courage and an air of arrogance; the sort of arrogance displayed by the main competitors in the *Tour de France*. If this means that cars behind me have to slow down, well then so be it. As a cyclist I have to rely on my cunning and wits. I don't have the advantage and protection of size, and there's certainly no room for apologies. After all, I've never seen a car flattened by a cyclist.

This means that as a cyclist I am quite often blest with what I can only take as the well intentioned advice sprayed at me from other road users. Road users, I might add, who have little appreciation for the enormity of the disparity between car and bicycle. They have bulk and horsepower; I have only my wits and a thin veneer of lycra neither of which cope too well with a close encounter of the bitumen kind. And so, as I've already said, as a cyclist I need to ride with very little sense of what I may have left behind.

I've seen similar traits exhibited by drivers of vehicles. I'm amused by the lengths to which some people will go to be first in line at the traffic lights. Drivers will seemingly skate across numerous lanes of traffic, oblivious to the chaos they may be causing, simply to fill an empty gap in the line up at the lights. And we all know what happens. As they speed off it is not long before we have again caught up with them at the next set of lights. To only look ahead safeguards us against dealing with the damage we might leave all around us.

Many of us live our whole lives in much the same way. We live for only what's ahead, or what we wish was ahead with very little sense of what we might be leaving behind. At best this is the admired quality of ambition. At worst it becomes conceit and selfishness.

To do this we have to take advantage of our opportunities, no matter how small they may be. We have to seize each second of each day for ourselves, like cyclists forcing themselves into minute gaps in the traffic. At other times this may mean exploiting the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of other people. It often seems the only way to get ahead is to capitalize on other people's failings and misfortune. If someone leaves a gap you might as well grab it for yourself. If you don't someone else will.

So we duck and weave our way through life.

The other day I read some words written by St Paul (Romans 15) in the Bible:

*1-2 Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?"*

*3-6 That's exactly what Jesus did. He didn't make it easy for himself by avoiding people's troubles, but waded right in and helped out. "I took on the troubles of the troubled," is the way Scripture puts it.*

It struck me that this passage was nothing like riding a bicycle through heavy city traffic. It's just the opposite. This passage challenges us to live our lives constantly looking over our shoulders, and not even for our own advancement. It says that the strong should be concerned for the weak and not exploit their weaknesses.

I'm not sure that I could survive on my bike with that sort of attitude. But I want to spend a moment talking about how the Bible suggests we can live a successful life whilst putting our faith into practice.

This passage firstly talks about what Jesus did. He identified as much with those who were left behind as he did with those who thought of themselves as being out in front. He identified equally with people who left gaps as those who exploited gaps.

From this understanding St Paul then challenges those people who consider themselves to be the frontrunners, particularly when it comes to putting faith into practice. The people who, at times, may have little sense of what they leave behind them. It's not enough to say that our strength is our justification for leaving weaker people behind and even damaged. No! We do need to know who is behind us. Even more so, we need to realize what damage, because of our lively vigour, we might be leaving behind. As Paul says, "Strength is for service not status."

When we're at the top it's easy to believe that we deserve to be there. When we believe that then it's very easy to believe that we deserve even more. In such a frame of mind it's equally easy to believe that people of misfortune are less deserving than we are. That might be the way of a cyclist in traffic but it's not the way of those who are living their faith. We need to enter into the world of those who are weaker than we are. We can only do that when we walk with Jesus who calls upon us to bless the weak through our strength. It means leaving the gaps in the traffic for them to enter. It means not using our strength to heighten their sense of weakness.

Am I going to change my riding style? Probably not. Cars are still much bigger than my bike. Am I going to walk with Jesus, loving and respecting those about me who are weaker than I am? I'm trying my best to do just that. And I pray that you also may try to do the same.

Jesus once said (Matthew 7: 1-5) "Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults— unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbour's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, 'Let me wash your face for you,' when your own face is distorted by contempt? It's this whole travelling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbour."

The fact is that God didn't put us on this earth to trip other people up. Quite the contrary, we are here to build each other up. It means that we don't need to be one step ahead with all of our ducking and weaving but in step with the very people who we thought were in our way. It's a scandalous way to live. It's a life lived by faith.