

9-1-1!

A STORY FOR LUCY

Rrrriiiiing.

Peter grabbed the phone from its charger and held it to his ear. “Hello?”

It was his mother’s voice. “Peter, the car broke down just as Daddy and I were leaving Carey Hilliard’s. We’re having to get it towed. Can you come pick us up in the van?”

Peter stalled momentarily. “Me, Mom? I can barely drive. I mean...” He thought fast. At seventeen, he had just gotten his license last week to help his father in the family business, but he hadn’t driven anywhere by himself yet. Dad was still teaching him how to maneuver the small car around the country roads. He had never tried the van! And in the dark? In the city?

“There’s no other way for us to get home, unless we find a taxi,” Mom said sympathetically. “I’m sorry, Peter. I know we put a lot on you by leaving you with the younger children and going out to eat, but we weren’t expecting this.”

“No, Mom, you didn’t put anything on me. I wanted you and Dad to have a night out together.” Peter thought fast. “I’m just not sure about driving the van all the way to the city at night. Do you think I’ll do okay?”

“It was Dad’s idea, and he’s sure you’ll do fine,” his mother assured him. “I’m a little nervous because all the little ones will have to go with you, but he said you’re doing great with the smaller car. And the van is not much different.”

“Hmm.” Peter’s eyes turned on his younger siblings eating pizza around the table. “Ummm... wow, Mom. Okay. What time do you need me to get there?”

“The tow truck is coming around eight o’clock. We’re sitting in the Carey Hilliard’s parking lot waiting.” Mom turned to say something to Dad, then came back to the phone. “Dad says drive slow and don’t rush—we can wait. Please be very careful, Peter!”

Peter nodded. “Yes, ma’am. I’ll be careful. See you soon.” He hung up the phone and looked around the cozy kitchen. What an unexpected turn to their quiet evening at home while their parents went out to eat! As the oldest son in the family,

Peter knew he had a lot on his shoulders. He had no faith whatsoever in his amateur driving skills. But he did have faith in God.

Breathing a quick prayer, he walked over to the table. “Are you guys almost done eating?”

His little siblings nodded. “Where are we going?” asked twelve-year-old Kate, his closest sibling in age.

“Dad and Mom’s car broke down and we have to go pick them up.” Peter grabbed the piece of pizza off his plate and took one last big bite. “Hurry and go put your shoes on. We’ll have to clean up when we get home.”

“Oooh, fun! I like car rides!” Five-year-old James jumped out of his chair.

Kate’s face showed a mixture of excitement and concern. “You mean—*you’re* going to drive us, Peter?” she asked nervously. No one but Dad had ever ridden with Peter behind the wheel.

“Yes.” Peter grinned in spite of himself—the look on his sister’s face was hilarious! “Don’t you trust me?”

“I guess a little.” Kate stared at her big brother, then slowly stood up. She removed two-year-old Mary’s highchair tray. “I’ll get Mary’s shoes on.”

“Yes, thanks. I’ll find my keys and wallet.” As he ran up the stairs to his bedroom, Peter felt butterflies jittering in his stomach. Dad and Mom, Kate, James, and Mary were all depending on him. The Carey Hilliard’s in the city was ten miles away through heavy traffic. Could he really do this?

Lord, You’ll have to help me, he prayed, closing his eyes and leaning against his bedroom wall for a second. *I don’t quite feel capable of this, but my parents believe I am. So maybe I am.*

The first verse of the psalm he had read in his Bible that morning flashed back into his memory: Psalm 91:1. *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.* Whispering the words to himself, Peter stuffed his wallet into his back pocket and ran back down the stairs. Kate had James and Mary waiting by the front door.

“Ready?” he asked, flashing them a smile.

The children stared up at their big brother. “I hope you’re good at driving,” Kate said soberly.

“Oh, you don’t know me,” Peter joked as they stepped outside and he locked the front door behind them. *May as well be optimistic,* he decided.

Kate strapped the younger two in their carseats as Peter climbed into the driver's seat. He felt around with his foot till he touched the pedal. He turned the keys and started up the engine. Then he put out one hand and moved slowly over the controls. He was sitting much higher up from the road than in the small car, and the controls were positioned a little differently. But Dad was right; the van was generally the same.

Kate closed the back door and settled into the passenger's seat next to Peter. Her face still looked doubtful.

"All right, here we go," Peter said confidently. "Ladies and gentlemen, this is going to be the ride of your lives." He slowly pressed the pedal, backing out of the driveway. The back tire hit a stick, jolting the van ever so slightly. "Never mind that tiny bump. I trust nobody flew out of their seat belts. Are all the passengers still in place?"

"Peter, don't joke," Kate pleaded. "Pay attention to your driving."

"Oh, I'm paying attention," Peter answered, his face sobering. And indeed he was. He just didn't want his little siblings to know how nervous he was. But his heart was pounding harder than ever as he turned the big van onto the road, his fingers clutching the steering wheel with a death grip. He leaned forward, focusing intently on the dark road ahead. The headlights shone bright and clear.

"Don't talk either. Just pay attention," Kate begged.

This time Peter did not reply as he concentrated on slowly gaining speed. At least these were the country roads he and Dad had driven on before—but everything was different at night! Where were those familiar stop signs, trees, and mailboxes he had counted on seeing to make sure he was staying off the curb? He leaned back, trying to remember Dad's advice. *Relax. Don't get so tense. Look ahead as far as you can at the road in front of you.*

In five minutes they were on the highway, cruising toward the city. Peter's grip on the steering wheel began to relax. But the children was tensely quiet, with even James staring silently out the window at the passing cars.

Peter looked sideways at Kate. "Wanna turn on some music?"

"Not really. It will distract you."

Peter couldn't help chuckling. "I'm doing okay so far, aren't I?" Inwardly he breathed another prayer—*Thank You, Lord. Now if I can just get into the city all right, I'll be fine.*

He hadn't told his siblings that his biggest problem was not starting or driving, but stopping. He was hoping against hope that the traffic light at the entrance to the city would not be red. He could already see himself tearing straight through the intersection, his foot unable to release itself from the accelerator, flying on right beneath the red light as people screamed and horns honked and policemen shouted, sending vehicles scattering in all directions before he finally screeched to a frantic stop and creamed head-on into the car before him.

They were almost to the city exit. Peter frantically reached for the turn signal. Which dial was it? There, that one. He shifted gears, unconsciously leaning sideways as if to encourage the van to move sideways to the right. To his relief, the van rolled smoothly off the highway toward the exit.

He squinted up ahead. Was that a red light? No, it couldn't be! As they neared the intersection, he desperately tried to release speed as he lifted his foot just slightly. He was liable to stop right here in the middle of the exit if he took his foot all the way off. It must be almost eight o'clock by now—Dad and Mom were waiting.

"Peter!" Kate screeched.

Peter jumped, and his foot hit the pedal, sending the car out of control. "What?" he gasped as he tried to regain composure. They were nearing the intersection where the red light gleamed tauntingly. Was his nightmare become reality?

"You—almost crashed right into that blue car." Kate pointed a shaking finger. "It just moved into the other lane."

"Oh, my, I didn't see. I was looking at my speed." Peter kept slowing down, almost to a stop. Slower, slower... *there*. Gracefully the van rolled to a complete stand-still right in front of the red light. That was perfect.

"I wish we didn't have to go through the city. It's so busy," Kate whispered.

Peter took a deep, long breath, grateful for the chance to stop and wait for the light to turn green. "I'd say the worst is over, Kate. As long as I don't have to stop again." He smiled at her in the darkness. "You know what verse I've been turning over in my mind this whole time? Psalm 91:1—'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.' Don't you think that's a nice verse? I can picture God's hand covering our van right now, keeping us protected in His shadow."

“Yes,” Kate sighed. “I know you’re right.”

“Daddy will drive home, won’t he, Peter?” asked James from the back seat.

“I have a pretty strong feeling he’ll be hired,” Peter grinned.

The light flashed green, and the cars around them began to move. Peter pushed the pedal down again—there, they were moving. He gazed intensely at the road ahead as traffic bumped and slid all around them. Thank God for city lights! Here there was no problem seeing road signs.

But so many turns! Peter jerked the wheel around and around, turning corners. They were almost to the middle of town where the restaurant was. It would be such a relief to get there. Peter’s lips moved in silent prayer as he dodged cars right and left. Why were other people such reckless drivers? He nervously slowed down to let the cars behind him stream past on the other lane.

And then he saw it—blue and red blinking lights. “Police, police,” Mary squealed. It was her new favorite word.

“Police? Why?” Peter checked his speed dial. *Uh-oh*. He was going 25, and the speed limit was 50. He’d been a little bit too nervous. Still praying, he rolled the van to a stop on the shoulder of the road. A tall policeman climbed out of his car and walked over to Peter’s window.

“You’re driving way too slow,” the officer said sternly.

“I know.” Peter’s voice sounded weak to his own ears. “I’m very sorry; I wasn’t looking. Sometimes it’s either the speed limit *or* the road before me.” He tried to smile. “I’m only seventeen and I just got my license and I have to go pick up my parents in an emergency. I have all my siblings in the car with me here, and I’m quite nervous,” he tried to explain. Then he immediately felt foolish. He hadn’t needed to say so much.

“Show me your license,” the policeman barked.

Peter pulled his driver’s license from his wallet and handed it over.

“Well,” the policeman growled, studying it, “you shouldn’t be on the road if you’re so unconfident. But I understand if it’s a family emergency. Get some more practice before you try the streets downtown at night again.”

“I definitely will, sir,” Peter said with a firm nod.

The officer handed his license back. “I’ll let you go this time. Watch your speed.” With a curt nod, he returned to his car.

Oh, Lord, that was just Your goodness. I could have easily gotten a ticket. Going half the speed limit is dangerous, Peter breathed as he moved the van back onto the road. *Thank You for protecting us again.*

Kate and James sighed in relief together as they began driving once more. Peter carefully watched both his speed and the traffic around him. Five minutes later, the flashing sign for Carey Hilliard's shone welcomingly bright in front of the windshield. "Here we are!" Kate's sigh was one of joy.

Peter shifted onto the turn lane and made a sharp turn into the restaurant parking lot. And there stood Dad and Mom on the sidewalk without their car. They looked up and waved with big smiles on their faces as the family van rolled into the parking lot. Flooded with relief, Peter honked the horn in greeting.

As soon as they had stopped, Peter flung open his door. Mom ran over and hugged him. "You did it! You did it!" she cried. "I'm so proud of you! We were praying the whole time!"

Kate, James, and Mary were all talking at once in excitement. Peter's heart was still fluttering as he unbuckled his belt and jumped down onto the parking lot. "All yours, Dad."

Dad patted Peter's shoulder warmly. "You did great, son. You'll have to tell us about your ride on the way home."

Dad and Mom got into the front seats, and Peter and Kate moved to the back. As he settled into the back seat between James and Mary, Peter began with a smile, "Well, I'll tell you the most important thing I learned. My emergency number isn't 9-1-1, but 91:1! I couldn't have done it without the Lord's protection!"

~ The End ~