

## **The Road Less Traveled – June 24, 2016**

This is the way I am telling the story. "On our trip to New Mexico this summer, I felled my first antelope." Impressive, right? Does it conjure up a picture of me in camouflage clothing, holding a 30.06 while crouching next to my prize? Well, really, not so much.

Here's the real story. Last Wednesday we left home a little after 4 a.m. to make the 11-hour drive to northern New Mexico. Our plan was to spend a week relaxing in the mountains, doing a whole lot of nothing. We had a quick breakfast in Wichita Falls and headed out again. We made it through Amarillo by mid-morning and had gone through the little town Dumas, headed for the Texas-New Mexico border. The weather was glorious. There was little traffic on the two-lane highway, and we were all enjoying comedy radio on Pandora.

I didn't even see the animal until it was practically on top of us. I caught the movement out of the corner of my eye as it leapt across the oncoming lane. I'm not sure whether it was charging our car (I have heard of deer doing that at night) or if it was trying to cross in front of us. Either way, it badly miscalculated. I swerved to the right, attempting to go around the animal, but I knew instantly it was too close.

The antelope hit right in front of the driver's side mirror and, judging from the damage, kind of bounced down the side of the vehicle. As I swerved, the wheels on the right-hand side of the car left the road, and we began skidding through the brush along the side of the road. Looking back, the most interesting thing to me was that everyone was calm. No one screamed. No one panicked, even though it seems like it took us forever to come to a complete stop. I remember the road sign looming ahead of us and my struggle to control the car so we did not hit it.

We did not hit the sign, and we finally did stop. Everyone was OK, and Melissa and I got out to survey the damage. It wasn't exactly minimal, but it was largely cosmetic. The car was drivable, and after talking to a nice couple who saw the accident and stopped to check on us, we were on our way again.

Now I tell you that story because I learned something from the experience. As we related the story to our insurance company and to friends we ran into in New Mexico, Melissa commented on my driving skills. She praised me for maintaining control of the vehicle as we skidded off the road at 75 mph. She was impressed that we did not hit anything else and that the car didn't flip.

But the truth is it had nothing to do with skill. Looking back, I weigh my decision to try to go around the animal, rather than hitting it head-on, a collision that would have surely deployed the airbags and badly damaged the car. I think about the car leaving the road and all the things I learned about regaining control in the midst of a skid. But the truth is, I wasn't really thinking about anything. I was simply reacting.

I didn't see the antelope until it was too late. I reacted, and before I knew it, we were stopped along the side of the highway in the middle of nowhere. I didn't think. I didn't weigh options. I simply reacted out of instinct. And the experience reminded me that much of life is like that. We make our plans. We map out our lives step by step. Career. Family. Home. All of it. And we do our best to live out those plans faithfully.

But the truth is that life sometimes comes down to simple reaction. The crisis comes from nowhere, and we don't have time to analyze and think and weigh our options. We simply react. And that reaction is born at the core of who we are.

That's why who we are is so important. And that's why what we do as a family of faith is so important. Because what we do is about discovering and cultivating who we are, who God calls us to be. So that when life darts out in front of us -- and it inevitably will -- we don't even have to think about it. We know where to turn.