



Oct '08

I sat on my bed, turning the electric clock over in my hands, wondering what must happen inside this small plastic box to make those metal hands spin round and round at exactly the right rate to measure time for us. Perhaps if I opened it up and looked inside I'd see exactly how it worked. I was only about ten years old, and both clocks and electricity were still mysteries to me, so with all of the enthusiasm of an explorer setting off, I went and got a couple of screwdrivers and a pair of pliers from Dad's workbench, and climbed back onto my bed. Sitting cross-legged, with my back to the center of the room so the overhead light illumined my work, I began to dismantle the clock. And this was no hack job. Each screw I took out, and each piece I lifted off was gently placed in order on the blanket beside me so that I'd be able to put it back together when I'd finished. Methodically, I forced myself to work slowly, despite my eagerness to understand this thing, in some ways small and simple, yet profoundly complex and ingenious in design.

*Oh, so that's what makes the alarm sound. But how does that striker move? Oh, it's attached to that spring-loaded lever. Who had the imagination to bend it just like that so that it would fit inside there and still have room to move? Well, how do the different hands move at different speeds? Oh, those different sized cogs make each one turn at just the right speed. How can there be so many different parts, and what do they all do?*

Clearly, I was going to have to completely disassemble it in order to see exactly how many parts there were, and how they fit together. If I got it down to all of its parts, surely I'd be able to see what made it tick, (so to speak). A few minutes later I'd almost done it. The little electric motor at the center of the whole thing was in my hands, with only the power cord still attached to it, except that the cord still ran through a hole in the injection-molded plastic box that formed the outside of the clock. If I cut the plug off the end of the cord, I'd even be able to pull the cord out and have it still connected to the motor. There. Done.

But really, not done at all. I may have seen how the power from the motor moved the cogs and hands and alarm, but how did the motor work? What actually happened inside that tiny metal box when it got plugged in that made the shaft coming out of it start to spin? Perhaps if I plugged it in, and watched it as the power started to flow, I'd see exactly how it worked. Oh, but I'd cut the plug off the end of the cord. Well, no matter. If I stripped a bit of plastic off the ends of each of the wires I'd be able to just stick the wires directly into the socket and watch the motor to see what it did.

A minute later my research came to an abrupt halt, and sadly I did not see exactly what happened inside the motor.

Of course, it is very difficult to see anything with your eyes as tightly shut as you can squeeze them. Furthermore, it is very challenging to focus on mechanical research when you are suddenly at the center of an experiment in electricity and human flight. At the instant that I gently inserted the wires into the socket, with all my attention riveted on the motor sitting in front of me, I very briefly caught a glimpse of a bright light near my fingers before my eyes slammed shut and my muscles all constricted at once. Because I was facing the wall and sitting cross-legged, the fact that my legs and arms suddenly straightened with more force than I could ever have voluntarily mustered meant that with both my hands and feet I pushed away from the wall, and launched myself into the air. I remember very little about my short flight, partly because it felt rather as if time had stopped, and partly because my attention was quickly drawn to the wall on the other side of the room as I slammed into it and dropped down onto my brother's bed. I consciously unclenched my jaw, started breathing again, and looked over to where I had been sitting a moment earlier.

Well, I hope you've at least started to wonder why I've shared this childhood memory with you. It isn't just because I wanted to give you another reason to laugh at my foolishness. It popped into my head the other day as I was listening to one of the young people I've been getting to know here, and struck me as a picture of a couple of things. Fairly obviously, it illustrates how easily young people can get so caught up in whatever they're pursuing that they ignore the possible consequences of their actions. It might be because they are so interested in being accepted by their peers that they fail to stop and ask if they're making good decisions. Or they might be unthinkingly following the hormonal urges of the new sexuality they're developing, and fail to consider the consequences of their actions. It might be the result of their sense of invincibility, or their youthful naivety. Or perhaps they're embracing the freedoms that come with being a little older, without understanding the responsibilities that come with those freedoms.

I think God brought this little adventure of mine to my mind as a way of keeping me from giving up on kids who get hurt making bad decisions. A young man I've been getting to know tried to kill himself this summer over his drug addiction. The teenage pregnancy rate, and the spread of sexually transmitted infections among teens are as bad here as almost anywhere in Europe. There is currently a widespread campaign in one of the neighborhoods of Inverness we work in, using billboards and bus stop ads, to discourage date rape. The abuse of alcohol through binge drinking and the normalization of drinking to the point of unconsciousness are rampant. All around me I can see young people sticking exposed wires into outlets, and getting hurt in the ensuing shocking experiences they have. My hope for them is that although they may have to deal with the consequences of the decisions they're making, perhaps God will somehow protect them, get their attention, and use their curiosity to draw them into relationship with Him. My job is to keep on loving them, and encouraging the other Christians I'm working with to reach into the lives of all these kids with hope and truth and love and faith, leaving the results to God.

I said that the story I shared could be a picture of a couple of things. Apart from all the ways it could illustrate how young people can get themselves in trouble, I suppose it could also be a picture of something really wonderful. What if all of us were so focused on following Jesus into the opportunities He gives us every day that we ignored the possible costs to ourselves? And what if, in the process of simply following Him we found ourselves unexpectedly connected to His amazing power, coursing through us and into the lives of the people around us? You know, if it would mean that a bunch of

these young people would turn away from all the deceptive, distracting, empty, hopeless foolishness that they're chasing right now, I'd be more than happy to risk a bit of a shock for them.

Thanks for taking those risks with me, through your support and encouragement. And thanks for taking these ramblings of mine and turning them into meaningful prayers.

God Bless!

Chris (and Pattie) Hyslop