

# PURE RELIGION

## The Easiest Thing

I heard the words often enough and each time I dreaded them. “Get up and get dressed, we’re going to the welfare farm.”

I was young enough that I didn’t have much of a choice in the matter. If Dad said we were going, that was the end of discussion. So we went and after a couple of hours, we’d return—our boots caked with mud from hoeing between the rows of tilled earth, our arms scratched by apple tree branches, our hands cold and blistered from pulling weeds.

“Why do we have to do this?” I asked.

“There are people who need our help,” Dad said in a tone of voice that made you think that it was the easiest thing in the world to do.

“Who needs our help?”

“Everyone needs help at one time or another,” he said.

But I could never figure out how what we were doing could really be of much benefit to someone who was poor. How many sugar beets could a person eat, anyway? And if they were so poor, why didn’t they come here and work themselves? I didn’t see any poor people at the welfare farm, only neighbors—people I knew.

The strange thing about it all was that it seemed my dad actually liked being there. It was as though the colder, the wetter, the dirtier we got—the happier he seemed to be.

A dozen or so years later, I was in my car with my wife and three children traveling

across country to attend graduate school when our car broke down. I had no money. No one would accept an out-of-state check. I didn’t even have a credit card. It was getting late and cold and my two youngest children were getting scared, the youngest was a baby and still nursing. My wife looked at me, trusting that I would figure out a solution to our predicament.

But I had no solution.

I called Dad and asked for his advice.

I eventually found an understanding hotel manager who believed me when I said I’d pay the bill the next day. When morning

arrived, so did my Dad with Mom at his side, they had driven all night long in their old station wagon. Attached to the back hitch was a tow bar for my car.

We were never so happy to see anyone. Dad made sure we were square with the hotel, attached my broken car to the tow bar and then drove us the rest of the way to school.

I must have thanked my parents a hundred times for helping us, but Dad just smiled and said, “everyone needs help at one time or another.”

And he smiled the same way he did when we worked in the sugar beet fields years before.

It was a smile that seemed to say that helping someone in need was the easiest thing in the world to do.

