

When the Volkswagen company first started making cars they built them without something we all take for granted. A gas gauge. You never really knew exactly how much gas was left in the car. But they built in a reserve tank which held one gallon of gas. They figured you don't need a gauge. Just fill up the car regularly. If you should run out of gas, you pull a lever which opens the reserve tank, and you'll have one full gallon to make it to the gas station. This feature proved so unpopular that you don't find it any more on any car.

But you do find it in people. We don't come with a gauge or a needle to tell us how much time till we need food, or sleep, or water. Instead, we fill up regularly. But occasionally we run out of gas. When we're low on food, our stomach growls. When we're low on sleep, our eyes won't stay open. When we're low on water, it's hard to talk. So, we pull the lever; we eat, we nap; sometimes we behave badly: we drink more coffee, we take alcohol or drugs, we go gambling, we yell at the kids. We have different levers we can pull to get us through whatever we're out of.

If we find ourselves pulling the wrong levers, chances are we're actually low on something else. Light. Spirit. Prayer. We come to church regularly for the same reason we eat and sleep regularly. It's good maintenance for the human vehicle. Weekly church is sort of like a regular stop at the gas station. It fills our days with peace; it helps us make better decisions; it makes us appreciate the wonder of life.

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple, they met a man and a woman who kept their spiritual gas tanks full. Simeon and Anna frequented the temple so much that when Jesus arrived, even as an infant, they knew he was the redeemer. They were alert to the plan of God. Simeon called Jesus "light", and so he is. When we run low on light, it is Christ who fills us. We are built in need of God, just as cars need gas. When we're feeling spiritually low, we're not necessary deficient, or bad--we may just be empty; that's how we're made.

But sometimes we neglect regular prayer until some tragedy reminds us we're running on empty. We pull the reserve tank, finally, and pray. "God help me out of this." And God will help. We can live life that way, going from one empty tank to the next, or we can fill up more regularly at home, at church, and in community service. Then the light of Christ will stay aflame within us.

[include announcement this weekend: Development Foundation, 2 stages; feasibility: will you support what kind of campaign?, then campaign]