

Ransom Notes

I Think I Can — I Know He Can Encouragement

Your friend's voice on the phone causes you to tremble. You have just been asked to bring devotions for a class party, supervise the nursery at church, or maybe visit a church member anticipating serious surgery. Your heart beats twice as fast as a bit of perspiration appears on your forehead. You frantically try to manufacture a legitimate excuse to say, "NO THANKS!"

My mind immediately leaps backwards eighty plus years. I'm cuddled down in bed as mother's words float off the page, "I think I can. I think I can, I think I can." I visualize the little blue Engine attempting to make it over the mountain, and encouraging himself to continue to battle onward and upward. Yes, she was reading, "The Little Engine That Could." for the umpteenth time. Subconsciously, I seriously believe Watty Piper's philosophy became imbedded in my DNA. Do you remember this tale?

Three Engines declined to help the train loaded with gifts for "good little boys and girls on the other side of the mountain." The Engine was stalled. His wheels would not turn, no matter how hard He tried. The dolls and toys were in need of assistance.

Our first Engine to come by was shiny and new. This Engine snorted out that He was a Passenger Engine. He would not "carry the likes of you." Hum! Sounds a bit snooty to me, as He steamed off, leaving the clown and toys stranded.

The little clown spotted Engine #2. Pleading with the Big Strong Engine for help, the toys shouted out, "Do pull our train over the mountain." But, to no avail, as the engine bellowed: "I am a Freight Engine. I am important in the lives of grown-ups, as I carry books and newspapers for them to read." Sadness covered the *needy riders*, as the big guy puffed and huffed off.

A third Engine was spotted. The toy clown once again waved a flag and pleaded for help. But, you guessed it, no help. The rusty old Engine sighed, "I am so tired. I just cannot do it, even though you have eager children waiting for you," and off he rumbled to the round-house chugging, "I cannot. I cannot. I cannot."

As a child, I am certain I failed to understand the full impact of those Engine excuses as played out in real life, but the story was engaging. Today I personify the action and visualize adults or businesses fitting each of the categories. In fact, I blush a bit as I think of times I have used variations of these excuses when a request for help or involvement with a need in our community or church arose.

All, however, is not gloom and tears. Our toy clown spots a tiny blue Engine chugging merrily along. Immediately the scene changes. This time the dolls and toys hear a voice asking, "What is the matter, my friends?" Goodness, someone recognized a need and initiated a helping voice and hand. Those in need cheered.

When told of the need, the Little Blue Engine responded, "I'm not very big. They use me only for switching in the yard. I have never been over the mountain." But, He recognized a need and agreed to help. The dolls could hear a faint voice coming from the Engine. "I think I can. I think I can. I think I can." Off they started as He tugged and pulled and tugged. Slowly, oh so slowly, the wheels began to move forward. As He puffed and chugged, the words continued, "I think I can. I think I can. I think I can."

Of course He made it over and all rejoiced as they heard the final words from the Little Engine. "I thought I could. I thought I could. I thought I could." A need was acknowledged. A volunteer created joy in the hearts of those reaching out for help. Rejoice.

Returning to the voice on the phone requesting your help, perhaps a lesson from the Little Blue Engine would be helpful. Our hero initiated the offer of helping, not waiting to be asked. He saw a need and offered His services, not even knowing for certain He was totally able to accomplish the request. His attitude was upbeat and helpful. He tried. He cared. He offered to help.

The job was very specific — get that train over the mountain. He stayed focused, but he also talked to himself. I guess trains can't pray, which is a human volunteer's option. But, pray we must. The Holy Spirit can help us, but it is helpful if we acknowledge a need and open our hearts for help, as we attempt to help others.

The author of Hebrews reminds us in Hebrews 3:13a, "But encourage one another daily." Christians need to keep eyes open for hurting, needy people, and then snap into action. Sometimes that is a quiet listening ear, holding a hand, or only praying behind the scenes. Other times it means going public and sharing the love of God in a more overt manner. Regardless, with God holding your hand, you can whisper the words, "I think I can with God's help." I think I can with God's hand holding me up."

When we hear of a need, we can take lessons from David in I Samuel 17. Upon observing Goliath and the Philistines challenging Israel, Dave volunteered to help. He didn't wait to be asked. Neither did the little train. Lesson for us: Keep those eyeballs peeled for opportunities to care and encourage one another. Then mumble under your breathe, with full confidence,

"I think I can. I think I can. OH Yes! I know HE can."