

Down Home: Life is like a smudgy windshield

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Lately, I've been in a bit of a slump.

I can't get the windows in our cars clean. Especially inside the windshields.

Joanna, who vowed to stick with me through thick and thin and even my goofy obsessions, thinks I'm about 99.44 percent nuts over this.

But I like clean car windows. Especially inside the windshield.

Who knows when I developed an intense desire to see clearly through car windows. But I remember as a teenager contorting my young, lithe torso in order to wipe the inside of the windshield forcefully enough to remove all hints of smudge.

Now, more than four decades after I received my first driver's license, that's not so easy. I wish carmakers produced a pop-up windshield so you can get at it cleanly. Not to mention clearly.

My two-step process

Through the years, I've developed a two-step process for cleaning windows. Start with normal window cleaner and a soft cotton rag. Spray and wipe. And then wipe some more. And turn the rag over and wipe again. Then get a new, softer rag and a solution that's half rubbing alcohol and half water. Spray and wipe until your elbow wears out. When you're done, you've got absolutely transparent windows.

Or so I thought.

Lately, I've not been able to eliminate the streaks. And they seem to get worse within a day or two and then even worse after that. It probably has to do with all the rain we've had lately.

Here's the weird thing: Suppose you've got a window that never gets touched, like the inside of a windshield. You'd think you could clean it once and never need to clean it again. It's just there. Unless you reach up and touch it or sneeze, it should stay pristine. Right?

Nope. I think it's because you can't completely eliminate the traces of soap from the window cleaner. Over time, the slightest residue attracts dust. So, every flaw in the cleaning process shows up. What you thought were smooth, clean swipes become awful smears. And they amplify as dust and grime accumulate.

I keep hoping I'll eventually figure out the perfect amount of window cleaner to spray, plus the correct ratio of alcohol to water in the second application. Then, voila! I'll drive around with super-clean windows.

It'll never happen. Because I'm not perfect. I can't clean perfectly.

A streaky and stained soul

When I think about it, I reflect on another way I'm not perfect. Sometimes—far too often, I'm afraid—I have been more annoyed by the smears and smudges that accumulate on my car windows than by the streaks and stains that accumulate on my soul. Too often, I've paid more attention to the balance of alcohol and water in my cleaning solution than I've paid to the balance of Scripture reading and prayer in my daily life.

No wonder my spiritual windows fog over when the storms of life roll in.

Lord, forgive me when my perfectionism turns toward something as silly as car windows. You know I've always believed everything worth doing is

worth doing right. But sometimes, I misvalue “worth.” I place a premium on thoughts and things that don’t matter, while I ignore the truly monumental events and issues and people you’ve placed in my life. Help me see my life more clearly, Lord. Just as if I’m peering through a perfectly clean windshield.