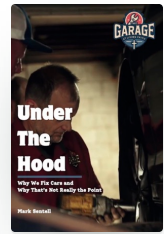


Under the Hood

Why We Fix Cars, and Why That's Not Really the Point

MARK SENTELL



This book shouldn't take very long to read, but I know you're busy, so if you can only read two pages, these are them.

Every car that comes through our doors is broken, and so is every person who comes with it. Every car started as a good design, then drifted from it. People are the same. "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). But something went wrong. The gap between what we were designed to be and what we actually are is the problem, and none of us can fix it ourselves. That's not an insult. It's a diagnosis. Honesty is an act of love.

The diagnostic doesn't fix anything, but it tells the truth. A good mechanic reads the fault codes before he picks up a wrench. God's moral law (love God, love your neighbor, don't lie, don't steal) is the spec sheet for a human life. "Through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). The standard isn't other people. It's the original design. But a long list of fault codes is not a reason to give up on the car. God shows you the list because he has a repair in mind.

The warning lights are not suggestions. They are gifts. "I knew something was wrong. I just kept driving." That's deferred maintenance, and it's how small problems become catastrophic ones. We do the same with our conscience, putting tape over the light. The Bible calls the final breakdown death: a permanent separation from God and everything good. If you carry guilt you can't shake, or a feeling that there has to be something more to life than this, you're not hopeless. Your warning system is working, and that means the car can be fixed.

The Master Mechanic made the machine, and then he came to our shop. "All things were made through him" (John 1:3). Jesus was God in human flesh, fully God and fully human. The engineer got on the floor of the shop. God didn't send a pamphlet. He came himself. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). Jesus faced everything we face, "yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). He is the only person who never drifted from the design.

Someone always has to pay the bill, and Jesus paid it. Even when The Garage fixes a car for free, the bill still exists. Someone else just paid it. Our wrongdoing has a real cost, and a just God doesn't pretend otherwise. But God is also love. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The cross is not a tragedy with a silver lining. It is the most intentional act in the history of the universe. Three days later Jesus rose from the dead, the proof that the payment was accepted and the repair worked.

God doesn't use the insurance company's math. An insurer writes a car off as a total loss when fixing it costs more than it's worth. But God is "rich in mercy," and "by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4-5). Grace isn't grace if you earned it. It comes to people with fault codes a mile long and says: I'm going to fix this anyway. All that remains is for you to walk through the door.

The repair begins when you hand over the keys. Faith isn't certainty or a feeling. It's trust in a person, and Jesus has given us every reason to trust him. Alongside faith goes repentance, which simply means a change of direction: you stop pretending the warning lights aren't on. You don't have to clean yourself up first or have it all figured out. You just come to God honestly and say:

1. I know I've broken things.
2. I know I've fallen short.
3. I know I can't fix this myself.
4. I believe that Jesus paid the bill I couldn't pay.
5. I'm handing over the keys.

If that's where you are, or even close, there's a simple prayer at the back of the book, and any of our volunteers would count it a privilege to sit with you. The door is open.

After the repair comes the road test. Old habits don't disappear overnight. But "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion" (Philippians 1:6). The Master Mechanic doesn't do half-repairs. He finishes the work on the road.

We fix cars because we love people, and we love people because God first loved us. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Good works don't earn the repair. They're the evidence it happened. That's why Michael started fixing cars in his driveway. And the road goes somewhere: "I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). God knows every warning light you've ignored, and he is not done with you.

That is the book. The rest of it shows why a room full of volunteers fixes cars for free, and why that's not really the point.

Free to share. Print it, copy it, hand it out, and use it in your church. Freely I have received; freely I give. "You received without paying; give without paying" (Matthew 10:8). If you'd like the whole book, it's at marksentell.com/books/under-the-hood, along with a free leader's guide.

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