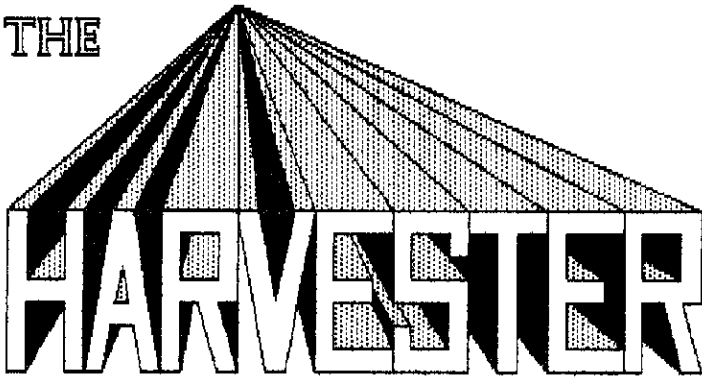


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"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2)

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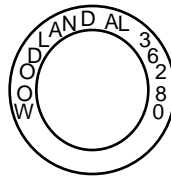
No. 182

DON'T WAIT AT THE FINISH LINE

The other day I read an article written in a "runner's" magazine and the author brought up an interesting point. He mentioned that when he is not actually running in a race, he likes to "stand by and cheer for other runners." His column was about encouragement.

But the intriguing portion of his article was this: when he watches the race, he does not stand at the finish line where most of the crowd gathers. He doesn't see the truth of the race there. Instead,

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he commented, "if you see anything through the crowd, it's usually a victory prance or vanity sprint as runners celebrate the last steps of their day's work."

No, he wrote, the real race is back a mile or so from the finish line. At this stage the end is not in sight, though it is near. Here you can see the true expressions of pain and perseverance and drama on the faces of the runners. This is where each contestant needs encouragement most. Deep in honest concentration, each runner seeks that final inspiration that will lift him/her toward the stretch and toward the finish line. Yes, this is where the race is real.

Now, can any of this be useful to you or me? Yes. We must remember the Christian life is often compared to a foot race (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Heb. 12:1-2). Each of us have a different course to run and a different finish line to cross. The problem comes when we try to cheer for our brethren just as they are ready to go across the finish line. I'm not saying it is wrong to encourage a brother at this particular time. But certainly there is a better time!

How often have we visited a close friend as he lay on his death bed? How many times have we waited until the last moment to reconcile a difference with someone? Why do we procrastinate words of encouragement to a person in dire need? This is what it means to wait at the finish line. How sad that we, though unintentionally, are all guilty of this travesty in life.

Perhaps we ought not to wait at the finish line to watch someone's race. Perhaps, like the writer mentioned, we should move up a few miles on the course and then see the race in our brother's face. We will see the reality of living a Christian life.

The Apostle Paul said in 2 Cor. 6:2, "*Behold, now is the day of salvation.*" He could likewise tell us, "Now is the day to make that visit." Don't wait until just before the runner is going to cross the finish line. Yet that is what we do! We never seem to find time to visit until the person gets sick. In some cases the person dies before we get there. Oh, how we wish we could have kept the earlier appointment. Then there would have been time to say the necessary things. We cannot turn back the clock. We cannot make the runner retrace his last few miles for us. Once across the line, his race is over. And once a person dies (Heb. 9:27), it is too late to make up for all the missed visits.

When it comes to 'mending fences', we put this off, too. It seems that when our adversary is on the death-bed, only then do we begin to realize that maybe it is time to patch up some differences. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe I forgot what started the whole dispute. Maybe it is time to make up. And so we shake hands and become friends again but how much time is left? Is the finish line that close? Perhaps I should have moved up to watch your race, my friend (Matt. 5:24). What if we had resolved our disagreement earlier? My, my, the wasted time.

THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God's harvest (Luke 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address and all correspondence to:

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Finally, there is the one who needs encouragement. When do we usually give it? At the beginning, the middle, or the end of the race? Surely words of concern and encouragement are needed every step of the way. But at the times when we fall down flat, when we make a terrible mistake in judgment, when we lose sight of the finish line and lose hope and forget our reason for running, that is when we need spiritual uplifting the most. Just as the runner seeks that inspiration when he is in pain and yet ever approaching the finish line, so each of us needs God's Word most during the trials and temptations of this life. We need it during the heat of the battle, not after the war is fought and certainly not after crossing the finish line!

No one knows when his course will end and where the finish line exactly lies. Therefore we should treat every day as if it were the last day for you and me (Jas. 4:14). Do I have anything I should tell you today? Should I visit, should I reconcile, should I forgive, should I encourage? Then let me do so now. Let's not wait at the finish line, my friend. It may be too late.

RAY McMANUS

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What accompanied the manna as it fell each night?
2. What day of the week did Jesus heal at Bethesda Pool?
3. What did the man, who cursed David in the town of Bahurium, throw at him?
4. What was the only church to aid Paul when he set out from Macedonia?
5. After Rahab was removed from Jericho, what was done to the city?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. According to Zechariah 9, which tribe does the Lord say He will bend as a bow?
JUDAH (Zech. 9:13)
2. Which apostle said he was ready to die with Jesus if He should go to where Lazarus was sick? THOMAS (Jn. 11:16)
3. How old was Ishmael when he died?
137 YEARS (Gen. 25:17)
4. At what time of day did Paul say drunkards got drunk? NIGHT (1 Thes. 5:7)
5. What two prophetic books are from the time of the Babylonian captivity?
EZEKIEL AND DANIEL

THE BIBLE AND ITS INFLUENCE

A tree is known by the fruit it bears. When we pick fruit from the branch year after year we do not need to be convinced that the tree is good because we have the evidence in hand. Christians do not need to be convinced that the Bible came from God; they have seen the fruit it bears.

No other book has ever had such an influence. It has always championed the right in every controversy and has never done despite to the individual who studied it. Because of its great influence, Christians believe that the Bible is a revelation from God.

Did you ever hear that a man who used to steal, drink, swindle, abuse his family, gamble, break up homes, beat his debts and was an immoral citizen was finally persuaded to read books on infidelity, atheism and doubt, and as a result he now goes to church, treats his family properly, pays his debts, lives a good moral life, is a good neighbor and a good citizen? No, and you never will because the Bible is the only book that has such influence on men. Christians can continue to declare that the Bible is the word of God and will be able to point at the fruit with pride. Where Christianity has gone, slavery has either retreated or been destroyed. While Mohammedanism has enslaved millions, Christianity has freed millions.

Manual labor is scorned in lands where the Bible has not gone. In the Old

Testament every man was compelled to learn a trade. David was a shepherd boy, Amos a farmer, Christ a carpenter and Paul a tentmaker. The statesmen of the world have been unable to improve the Laws given by Moses more than three thousand years ago.

When a tyrant seeks to take away the liberty of the people, one of the first acts is to take away the Bible and attempt to close or regulate the churches. The fountain head of Bible translation has been Geneva, Switzerland and it is no accident that it has also been the home of the World Court, the League of Nations, and the World Red Cross. The rights of the common people are freely granted where the Bible is freely circulated.

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trust the seed. Tampering with the seed once it is in the ground is senseless. So is tampering with God's word in human hearts. Let it cut to the heart, convict the sinner, and demand what it demands. Let it reproduce "*after its kind*" and not be altered by the genetic engineering of denominational theology, human opinion, or cultural standards. Sow it. Watch it grow.

STEVE KLEIN
copied from 1 Faith

AUTOMATIC SEED

Something that is automatic acts on its own and operates without visible cause. Most of us are familiar with the automatic doors in supermarkets. Did you know there were doors like that in the time of the apostles? When an angel was helping Peter escape from prison, "*they came to the iron gate which leads to the city, which opened to them of **its own accord***" (Acts 12:10). The bold print is the English translation of the Greek word "automate" which the inspired writer used to describe the action of the gate.

The gospel is like an automatic door. It works on its own. Once in place, it doesn't need human assistance. Jesus made this point in the parable of the growing seed (Mark 4:26-29). Using the same Greek word used to describe the gate, He said: "*The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops **by itself**; first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.*" The seed of the kingdom is the word of God (Luke 8:11). When it is sown, it will grow on its own.

As a sometimes impatient gardener, I know how it feels to sow seed and have to patiently wait for it to sprout, grow and yield fruit. But once the ground receives the seed there is precious little to be done but water, wait and
(continued on page 7)