

They Won the Race But Lost the Cargo!

Many years ago when steamboats populated the mighty rivers of the United States, there was an incident that makes a point as relevant today as when it took place. Two steamboats were in a race on the Mississippi River. As they were nearing the end of their journey between New Orleans and Saint Louis, the steamboats began to slow, both running out of their reserves of wood for fuel. Then one of the steamboats improvised and began to burn its cargo. They pulled ahead of their competition, and not to be undone, the other steamboat burned some of its cargo. The vicious cycle continued until the boats both finished the race in record time, but by the time they had landed in port, the cargo was completely gone. At this point it didn't matter who won their personal competition, because their purpose on the river was now diverted by the race that, in fact, served no useful purpose.

In II Samuel 18:19-33, we read of two who raced to David with the news after the defeat of Absalom. If it were not such a sad piece of news that was being delivered, it could have been funny. Ahimaaz wanted to bear the news to David of the outcome of the battle. He was forbid by Joab because of the severity of the message and intended to send the news at the hand of Cushie. Ahimaaz insisted, *"Let me now run..."* (II Samuel 18:19). In II Samuel 18:22, it reads, *"Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cushie. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready?"* The Bible points out that Ahimaaz outran Cushie, but when he got to David he had no news to bear. He won the race, but served no purpose. You might say, he ran simply to be running. Do you ever do something that is fun, entertaining, competitive, but serves absolutely no purpose? Let's talk about this:

1. If diverting is good for you, do it.

Sometimes in the busy world that we live in, we need a break. Perhaps you are being suffocated in your office and need some fresh air. Eating your lunch in a pleasant environment or taking a break in an aesthetic place can bring you back to your work with a refreshed attitude. When I suffer writer's block, a change often does me well. Jogging, tennis, golf, or fishing can sometimes ease the load.

I have often tried to carry too much from my car to the office and in an effort to save trips, I drop my load and then expend more energy cleaning up my mess, whereas an extra trip could have saved time. Jesus said, *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus also said, *"Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat"* (Mark 6:31).

In c. 2400 B.C., Ptahhoptep wrote, "One that reckoneth accounts all the day passeth not a happy moment. One that gladdeneth his heart all the day provideth not for his house. The bowman hitteth the mark, as the steersman reacheth land, by diversity of aim." In 1659, James Howell said, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

Our Lord knew the power of diversion better than any. He knew if the disciples took time to relax and just be with Him, there would be more power to serve Him in the heat of the day. Even music is more beautiful with an occasional rest in the piece. Someone observing Leonardo da Vinci as he painted came back some time later and remarked, "While I was gone it appears you have made no changes in your painting." The gifted artist replied, "I make my most telling strokes after my longest pauses."

2. If diverting bears the potential of harming others or yourself, don't do it.

Sometimes practical jokes can be a lot of fun. Other times they bring a lot of pain. If you have fun and it destroys health or someone's sense of value, this is wrong. On a radio talk show they were giving a prize for the person who would drink as much water as they could, as fast as they possibly could. The prize would have gained the person a lucrative advantage. Sadly a young mother in need of some extra funding took the challenge and everyone joked, laughed and carried on while she competed in this contest and in a little while she died from water poisoning.

Just recently in a game of cat and mouse, two motorists kept vying for position, trying to best and/or run the other off the road. A crash occurred involving a third, uninvolved automobile, killing a five-year-old boy, and injuring very seriously the mother and her little baby daughter. No game is worth this.

Sometimes the diverting does great damage to someone's emotional state. Making fun of someone to the point of embarrassment is torture. There should never be bullying in the Body of Christ. Let this not once be named among us. A joke is never funny at someone else's expense.

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (I Corinthians 10:31). A good question we should always be willing to ask ourselves before any activity is, “Can I do this for the glory of God?”

3. If diverting takes you away from God's purpose for you, postpone.

Sometimes diverting is not harmful, it is just unnecessary. Now if it gives us a “breather” as we were pointing out in the first point, do it. If the diversion moves you away from God's purpose, consider postponing the pleasure and doing what you are supposed to do first. We need to remember to “keep the main thing, the main thing.” I am not saying the diversion you planned is wrong; it may simply be the wrong timing. The completed rhyme of the quote I made earlier goes like this:

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,

All play and no work makes Jack a mere toy.

There must be a balance in our work and in our play. Playing becomes much more enjoyable if we do our work first. While growing up, if my mom had some chores for me on a Saturday and I ran out early to play sandlot ball with my friends, my work loomed in front of me like the proverbial “Sword of Damocles.” I dreaded going home. And when I did arrive home, I was greeted by an unhappy mother and warnings that if I did not get my chores done immediately, I would be in trouble. What a contrast! When I did my chores first, my recreation was so much more enjoyable. When I returned home I was happier, Mom was happier and Dad was proud of me.

Jesus said, “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:33). If it is fun, worth doing and you can do so for the glory of God, enjoy yourself. If you have work to do, the fun can wait. In the long run, the work and fun will be much more enjoyable. Remember this wonderful reminder from wise old Solomon at the end of his life: “*I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.*” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). God will give you the time to do what you need to do; don't lose your cargo in an extravagance that throws God's plan to the wind.

I love this verse: “*Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world*” (John 11:9). If we live by God's clock,

we'll have time for everything!

- Pastor Pope -

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