

Step Forward; Never Step Back!

Step forward; never step back! While contemplating Nic Wallenda's walk across Niagara Falls tonight, I am reminded of his famous great-grandfather, Karl Wallenda and the family of aerialists known as The Flying Wallendas. Several years ago the Wallendas were performing with Ringling Brother's Circus. They were quite a draw in every town they visited. In one of the towns in which they were performing, the local weather reporter asked the patriarch, "May I give the weather report on the high wire?" Karl agreed and the reporter hurriedly took note on how he would step out and balance to give the weather report and then his (the reporter's) idea was to quickly step back as his television station broke for a commercial. At the moment of reporting, the reporter stepped out, gave a quick, "Tomorrow the weather will be overcast, high of 82 degrees, low of 73!" Immediately the commercial break came and the reporter asked, "Mr. Wallenda! How do I get back, right foot or left foot?" In his haste to make high viewer ratings rather than be safe, the reporter was totally unaware of his new predicament. Karl Wallenda said, "Son, step forward, I'll be right behind you, we'll make it to the other side." The nervous reporter said, "Mr. Wallenda, I can't do that; I have never walked the high wire. Please! I am only one step from being back to where I started." Wallenda said, "Son, I have walked the tightrope all my life and you don't want to step back. You've got thirty-three steps in front of you. Believe me, it is safer to take thirty-three steps forward than one step back. Don't be afraid, I'll be right behind you."

The principle is especially true in the Christian experience. Walk forward with Jesus, no matter where He leads you. It is always safer to walk forward in His will than to take one step back, away from Christ and His plan for your life! Don't worry, Christ will be right with us each step of the way. Never retreat! The Bible says, "*...This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before*" (Philippians 3:13). I would like to discuss three ways a tightrope walker keeps going forward without falling off, which will relate to walking with the Lord.

1. Stay Balanced.

If you have seen any amount of tightrope walking, you have noticed that almost always the tightrope walker will have a pole in his or her hand. This does two things: the pole increases the aerialist's point of inertia and the downward bend of the pole lowers the aerialist's center of gravity. Without balance, the walker cannot stay on the wire. Danger awaits the tightrope walker who dares try to walk without it.

One of the great reasons we make constant reminders to be faithful to church services, prayer, Bible reading, moral discipline and witnessing is the same reason a tightrope walker will carry a pole -- these activities help keep us balanced. Consider the man who does a great amount of Bible study, yet is negligent in his prayer life and moral discipline. He will become imbalanced and

soon will fall off into something like immorality or heresy (false doctrine). The Bible says, *“Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life”* (II Corinthians 3:6). Bible without the Spirit becomes lethal. Moral discipline coupled with prayer will provide the fullness of the Spirit and only God, the Holy Spirit can provide correct biblical understanding, for the Scripture says, *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (I Corinthians 2:14). The balanced person will stay straight, receive the correct message from God and will not fall. God said in I Peter 1 to add to your faith virtue, knowledge (of the Bible), temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. In I Peter 1:10, God said, *“..for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”*

2. Stay Relaxed.

Being uptight can cause havoc on the tightrope. Relaxation frees the muscles up to maximum use and we do what needs to be done with greater agility. So often in the work of the Lord we get tensed up as though we are the ones to make things happen. The Bible says, *“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.*

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Hebrews 4:9-11). The prophet Zechariah said to Zerubbabel that it is *“...Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts”* (Zechariah 4:6). Zerubbabel led the first exodus from Babylonian captivity back to Israel, the land of promise. He was in the lineage of David and progenitor of the Lord Jesus Christ. He also led the building of the second temple. Zechariah was telling him in essence, “To get the people settled in the land and the House of God re-built, you need to understand that it shall not be done by human ingenuity or man’s wisdom and strength, but it shall be accomplished through the Spirit’s work in and through you -- so relax and let God be God! We all need to stay relaxed and rest in the Lord.

3. Stay Focused.

Our theme for this article is step forward, never step back. This final principle of walking the tightrope with success returns us to an emphasis on forward thinking. The business world has even adopted a philosophy based on the Wallendas, even calling it the “Wallenda Factor” referring to the fear of falling or failing. Karl Wallenda fell to his death in 1978 while crossing a 75-foot high wire in downtown San Juan, Puerto Rico. His wife, also an aerialist, discussed that fateful San Juan walk, “perhaps his most dangerous.” She recalled: “All Karl thought about for three straight months prior to it was falling. It was the first time he’d ever thought about that, and it seemed to me that he put all his energies into not falling rather than walking the tightrope.” Mrs. Wallenda added that her husband even went so far as to personally supervise the installation of the tightrope, making certain that the guide wires were secure, something he had never thought of doing before. When Karl Wallenda poured his energies into not

falling rather than walking the tightrope, he was virtually destined to fall. This reminds me of what Dr. Gibbs told us the one thing pilots must do: no matter what kind of turbulence or trouble they are going through, “Don’t forget to fly the plane.” It sounds so simple, but this is where we often get into trouble, when we forget the make and keep the main thing the main thing!

Aerialists learn to walk the tightrope by first putting the tightrope on the ground, then raise it up about a foot, then raise it up two feet, then four feet, then six feet until they are high in the air, with the “greatest of ease.” According to Karl Wallenda, the only real difference between walking the tightrope a foot off the ground and 20 stories off the ground from one building to another is the risk to you and those working with you. The skills and techniques are pretty much the same, regardless of the height – with some added focus and greater attention. The art of balancing and focusing is the same.

When Peter took His eyes off Jesus, that’s when he began to sink beneath the waters. In 1968, ten years before Karl’s fall, he said, “Walking on the tightrope is living; everything else is just waiting.” Stepping forward into a successful walk with our Lord means for us that Jesus is everything! Our Lord used a vivid exaggeration of what it means to follow Him when He said, “*And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*” (Matthew 10:36,37). In truth, when we love Jesus more than anyone else, we will love all others more than we would have otherwise. The point our Lord was making was that we must live with the attitude: Jesus is everything. Don’t look back, don’t look down. The Bible commands: “*Looking unto Jesus...*” (Hebrews 12:2); He is our focus!

-Pastor Pope-