



Complacency!

by Mark Brunner

## *The Downhill Course!* (Joel 3:21)

One thing about water, it always finds the easiest pathway to its destination. I watched it rain the other day and as the drops fell harder and faster, tiny, little waterways began to collect in our driveway. They wound around the drive in delicate finger-like patterns as they coursed toward the edge of the hill overlooking the No Name creek below. As I watched each little stream course over the hill, I was struck with the fact that what had been individual and interesting in the patterns they made in the driveway, had become dull and patternless as the water merged into the muddy creek. The easy but individual path above the creek was quickly translated into a nameless, meaningless path below.

Often what begins with an individual effort and purpose may often end in a meaningless, slow progression toward sameness and the dull. It is easy to become complacent when the path becomes difficult, even tedious.

Complacency is a blight that saps energy, dulls attitudes, and causes a drain on the brain. The first symptom is satisfaction with things as they are. The second is rejection of things as they might be. “Good enough” becomes today’s watchword and tomorrow’s standard. Complacency makes people fear the unknown, mistrust the untried, and abhor the new. Like water, complacent

people follow the easiest course – downhill. They draw false strength from looking back. (Bits & Pieces, May 28, 1992, p. 15.)

Following the easy path can lead to immediate reward and satisfaction. However, the easy path usually translates into a false sense of reality. There is no identity or purpose in being thrown together with all the rest. Like those streams of water above the creek, God made the Christian to be distinctly who we are. He did not mean us to become a part of a slow moving body of human sameness. Do you find yourself doing and being like everyone else around you? If so, perhaps it's time that you stop and take stock of who God meant you to be? Following the downhill course is easy. It's getting back up the hill that's so hard. There may be safety in numbers, but living apart from God and the distinctly Christian path He meant you and I to follow can only lead to a false sense of security and a slow ride to destruction.

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)*

## *Holy Flight Feathers!* (Malachi 2:11-12)

As I get older I am increasingly tempted to eat more and exercise less. As they say–It comes with the territory. I find myself packing more for lunch and eating that lunch a little earlier every day. My morning exercise routine, fifteen minutes on the Nordic skier and five minutes on the weight bench, has become more and more tedious. In fact, what I once felt was a meaningful part of my morning routine, is fast becoming a burden as I often look for ways of avoiding the 20-minute ritual.

It's a matter of yielding. Yielding gets easier the more often we succumb to it. Unfortunately, after time, the yielding becomes less of a yield and more of a habit. What at first made me feel guilty, was fast becoming only slightly uncomfortable. Here's a story: Ronald Meredith, in his book *Hurryin' Big For Little Reasons*, describes one quiet night in early spring: Suddenly out of the night came the sound of wild geese flying. I ran to the house and breathlessly announced the excitement I felt. What is to compare with wild geese across the moon? It might have ended there except for the sight of our tame mallards on

the pond. They heard the wild call they had once known. The honking out of the night sent little arrows of prompting deep into their wild yesterdays. Their wings fluttered a feeble response. The urge to fly—to take their place in the sky for which God made them—was sounding in their feathered breasts, but they never rose from the water. The matter had been settled long ago. The corn of the barnyard was too tempting! Now their desire to fly only made them uncomfortable. (Jim Moss.)

Becoming complacent about the things that are truly important gets easier as we get older. That's the way it is when the temptation becomes a habit. Unfortunately, temptation is always enjoyed at the price of losing the capacity for flight. God made you and I to fly, to rise above temptation. When we become complacent with the things that are truly important, our faith and our relationship with Christ, we open the door to temptation and the possibility of losing our wings.

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## *No Halfway Measures!* (Revelations 3:15)

One of my favorite movies is Ron Howard's Apollo 13. The challenges facing those three astronauts as they limped back to earth in their wounded spacecraft were dramatic. One of the less dramatic but interesting moments of the film, however, occurred early on before the launch. The ship's pilot, Jim Mattingly, had just finished a good training session in the lunar module simulator. As he and the other astronauts walked down the gangplank he announced, to the amazement of the crew and technicians, he wanted to go through the docking procedures yet again, for the umpteenth time. Although the crew had already accomplished their goals, for Mattingly they weren't good enough. He wanted to make the next effort even better.

When we become satisfied with our good efforts, we often open the door to the possibility of a “good-enough” attitude— an attitude that can easily lead to complacency. A certain amount of permanent dissatisfaction with our talents is probably a healthy thing. Those who are totally satisfied with their work will

never reach their fullest potential. Here's a story: The great pianist, Paderewski, achieved tremendous popularity in America. Yet, said Paderewski, "There have been a few moments when I have known complete satisfaction, but only a few. I have rarely been free from the disturbing realization that my playing might have been better." The world considered Paderewski's playing near perfection, but he remained unsatisfied and kept constantly at the job of improving his talent. (Bits & Pieces, November, 1989, p. 16.)

If good enough were God's standard, there would be no salvation and our lives would be subject to the whims of fortune and chance. God chose to sacrifice His Son to redeem the people He loved. He didn't choose to go halfway and merely punish Christ, He allowed Him to suffer a painful death, to pay the full price of redemption. God does nothing halfway. And He expects the same from us. Like Mattingly, God wants us to be willing to make the extra effort; to find out if we can do it better. Who knows what surprising talents lay hidden within each of us. If only we take the time to find them?

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## *Holy Waiting?* (Joel 1:5)

Over this past weekend my wife and I decided to do some landscaping work in the side yard. It involved stripping some sod and weeds away from a fencerow and around a garden enclosure as well as digging out the soil for a few inches and then filling the shallow trenches with decorative mulch. After gathering the tools that I would need and tossing them into the garden trailer behind the tractor, we headed off to work. Stripping the sod would take some effort but, with a good sharp spade and some moist soil beneath, I knew it could be done. It didn't take long for me to lose that hope, however. The second the spade hit the earth and I began to push against the sod, there was little give. The spade was old and blunted and couldn't do the work. I would never move sod with that spade. It was discarded for a new one pretty quickly.

How it is with our own lives. In times of peace and prosperity our moral senses can become dulled, barely able to do the work God has put them in place to do.

We seem content to wait and remain on the sidelines, contented for the moment, not willing to be sharpened by getting involved. The following inscription was found inscribed on an old monastery wall: “I wish that I could encourage all men to long passionately after God. Because so many have refused to want God so, they have fallen into a state of complacency. I long to inspire them from their stiff and wooden worship. Yet they are content to wait—a sort of holy waiting. How can I tell them that Christ waits to be wanted and it is not theirs’ to wait for Him? How sad it is that Christ waits so long for many, so very long, so very long in vain.” (Source Unknown.)

If God must choose between a sharpened spade and one that has become dull, which of the two do you think He will take? If there’s work to do, God will choose the sharpened spade, the Christian that isn’t content to wait around, hoping that if the wait is long enough, the work will be accomplished by someone else. Each of us needs to stay sharp in the Word, ready and willing to feel the grip of our God upon our shoulders when there is work to do. Holy waiting? Not when there is holy work to be done!

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## *A Spiritual Bump On The Head!* (Isaiah 32:9-17)

Have you ever found yourself saying “I’ve never done that before. I just can’t understand how that happened?” I don’t know about you, but I’ve said it many times. Something happens when we least expect it, out-of-the-ordinary, and we are puzzled. “That wasn’t supposed to happen!”

I was trimming branches on our beech trees the last weekend with an extended limb shears. You know, one of those long pole saws with the extension handle? It’s something that I’ve done for years and have gotten to the point where I barely give it much thought. That is until the other day when I lopped a good-sized branch about 25 feet up and it landed squarely on top of my bald, head. For a few moments I was stunned. When I came to my senses I looked at the limb laying beside me; then, looking upward at the stub of a branch from

which it had launched, rubbed the bruise on top of my head and wondered—  
“How did that happen?”

“How did that happen?” Well, usually it’s when we become so self-assured and complacent that things just happen. Here’s a story: Several years ago a young Frenchman captured the attention of the world by walking a tightrope between the towers of a New York skyscraper (1350 feet high). A few months later, however, while practicing on a relatively low wire in St. Petersburg, Florida, he fell 30 feet and was injured. As he lay waiting for help, he reportedly beat his fist on the ground saying, “I can’t believe it! I can’t believe it! I never fall!” (Source Unknown.)

As Christians we need to stay constantly alert to the dangers of this life; whether that be the temptations of Satan and the world or the simple stewardship of taking care of our bodies and preventing accidents. When we say that we never fall it is a warning sign that a fall is likely to be happening soon. It’s easy to become complacent when things are going along well. We quickly lose sight of the God who grants us all things and begin to go through life by mechanical motions and not prayer and supplication. Sometimes a bump on the top of our spiritual heads is the only way to wake us up.

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