

LEARNING ABOUT PACING

When I was a child, our family made an annual pilgrimage to visit our "kissin' cousins" in the Bluegrass state of Kentucky. I loved the beaten biscuits and fried chicken for breakfast. Most of all, I loved to watch the race horses training.

Sometimes, early in the morning, we would drive out from where we were staying in Mount Sterling to a nearby farm. Sitting on the top rail of a white-washed fence, I could watch the high-stepping pacers prance around the harness-racing track. They looked like they could run forever—their heads high, moving two legs on the same side of their bodies together in a two-beat gait. I was bothered when the jockey, sitting low between the wheels of the sulky, would reach out and flick his whip against the horse's flank. One of my cousins told me it was not to inflict pain, but to give a signal to the horse.

"The horse runs the race," she said, "but the jockey sets the pace. The horse just obeys."

Race horses—the kind that gallop—can run only short stretches. If they push beyond that, they die. Trotters and pacers, however, can keep going for long stretches.

Recently someone sent me a newspaper column written by an old acquaintance, the pastor of a huge Baptist church in Atlanta. He was resigning his church after 26 years—quitting the ministry publicly. He quoted statistics of how preachers, rabbis and priests are "dropping like flies," leaving their ministries to become "teachers...chaplains for corporations or bureaucrats in denominational jobs." He blamed it on stress.

It was a sad commentary by a good man worn down by the demands and pressures of being a pastor.

My recent bout this past summer with a life-threatening cancer, followed by God's miraculous healing, has shown me how close I was to that stage myself. But God didn't want me to resign: He wanted me to "re-sign"—at a different speed. Unfortunately, most of us don't respond to the flick of the whip. We are determined to be faster, better, richer and bigger than somebody else. Always racing, we don't know how to pace, much less how to pause and rest.

Thanks to God's intervention, I emerged from that strange summer with a number of new re-

solves. I'm determined never to go back to the old lifestyle. That includes the way I was eating, the way I was treating my wife and family, the way I was pushing my body and the way I was simply omitting God from many of my decisions.

Prayer has become the most important thing I do each day. Early in the battle, as I was desperately seeking God, a quiet word came one morning: "Cooperate with Me, and I will heal you." I knew that meant, "Obey Me in all things."

Now, translated into life, it means I'm spending my quality time reading the Bible, simply to hear what God is saying to me. Then there are the long walks with my wife, holding her hand as we pray and talk about things, big and little. I've changed my diet and have learned to stop and rest. And I've determined to let someone else judge my fellow Christians. I'm just going to love and pray for them.

After the cancer diagnosis, the first thing I did was cry out to God—not for healing, but for His presence to be real in my life. The second was to huddle with my wife, repenting before God. The third was to go to work on my schedule.

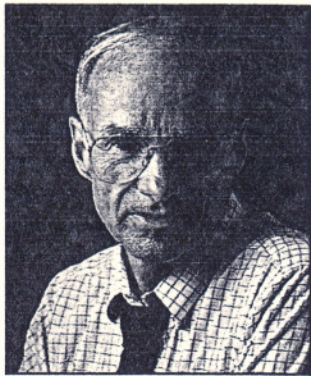
I once told someone I wish I had an excuse to cancel or postpone everything on my calendar. The first of July that time arrived.

One of the things I postponed was leading an October hiking trip in Israel. My surgery was healing, and I could have pushed myself to do it—but I knew it would please God if I put it off until late April when I would be at full throttle. (By the way, if you want to go along, write to me in care of *Charisma*, 600 Rinehart Road, Lake Mary, FL 32746.)

Here's what I've learned about pacing:

- Some things don't need to be done. Cancel them.
- Some things can wait. Postpone them.
- Some things are to be done now. Do them.
- In all things, seek God's plan and God's timing.

I pray that I'll become so spiritually tuned that God will never again have to use His big stick to get my attention—that a simple flick of His switch will result in my instant obedience. ■



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