

Chapter 21

**Approaching the Goal**

As a youngster, I never won prizes in running. I was slow and clumsy. The one race I recall enjoying, although I never won, was the cross-country. The course was so narrow and rough that we could not run together. Instead we started 20 seconds after each other, and the officials had to keep their eyes focused on their watches as the runners arrived at the finish line. We started in a beautiful cherry orchard two or three miles from the school, and the first section wound down a dry creek-bed where we had to run over a bed of smooth round stones that tended to roll under our feet. Then the path led up a hill, past Eve's Knob and down a steep bank past a little waterfall, into a narrow gully. The bank on the other side was so steep we had to climb on hands and knees if we didn't want to take the long switch-back trail to the top. Running across the face of the steeply sloping hill below Adam's Knob, we ran through a massive gate in the ancient city wall, and down the rocky Mule Road to the China Inland Mission compound where the school was located. We found it exhilarating to put on that extra spurt at the end, and hear the applause of those watching us finish the race.

Although I never achieved a prize in that run I rather enjoyed the variety of the paths we had to follow. As I look back I think of that cross-country run as a small picture of my life. In that race I never won a prize, and in life I have never achieved any fame; few people have ever heard of me, but the Lord knew every detail of my path.

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For nearly 50 years my parents served under the China Inland Mission, an organization that depended on God to supply all their needs, and never once authorized

any member to ask anyone for money. All requests were to be made to the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills and all the gold and silver in the world. He supplied beautifully for the mission which grew to consist of well over 1,300 members. All those members had to eat. They all needed clothing. They all had heavy traveling expenses, and many had children who needed an education. God supplied abundantly. In their testimony to God's faithfulness the mission borrowed from the Bible two of the names of God, which they used freely in their literature:

**Ebenezer** (*Hitherto the Lord has helped us!*) and

**Jehovah-Jireh** (*The Lord will provide!*)

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Bernadine and I learned early in our married life that indeed God does delight in supplying the needs of His children. For one example, I have no idea how God provided the money for our daughters' college education at John Brown University in Arkansas. To this day it remains an inexplicable miracle in my mind. I simply cannot explain where the money came from. Admittedly the Lord provided me with an outstandingly frugal wife who learned in Depression days how to stretch every penny to its limit and far beyond. Without her money-saving skills my life as a pastor would have been exceedingly difficult. And as a family we still constantly marvel at how the Lord continues to supply our needs.

Yet there were times when reality seemed to come crashing in on my mind. Can God really be trusted? One unforgettable day while serving the church in Hillsdale, Oklahoma, I was shopping in some stores on the square in Enid. An elderly man stopped

me on the sidewalk and asked if he could preach at our church. Here was a preacher who had retired from a “respectable” church in Enid, desperately begging for an opportunity to earn some money by preaching! Was it possible that God had failed to look after this man who considered himself a servant of the church? I am reminded of an old pastor talking to a young man who had chosen the ministry simply because it seemed to be a good way to make a living. The pastor asked, “Was you called, or did you just went?” What about me? Would I end up wandering along some sidewalk, begging for an opportunity to make a dollar or two by preaching? What about all those promises that the Lord would supply all my needs? Was it true or was it all a terrible lie? I thought of that question asked by the Israelites long ago, “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” (*Psalm 78:20*)

In answer to that question, a poster containing three quotations from the King James Bible comes to mind, a poster that often appeared on the walls of the homes of missionaries:

***“The sun stood still!”*** (Joshua 10:13)

***“The iron did swim!”*** (2 Kings 6:6)

***“This God is our God!”*** (Psalm 48:14)

Years went by after that shock on the Enid sidewalk, but the reverberations lodged somewhere in the recesses of my mind to haunt me again and again.

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One of the lessons the Lord was teaching me was that He was more interested in me than in what I was accomplishing for Him. He encouraged us by allowing us to see individuals turning to Him, and believers growing in their love for Him. All went well

through the years, as we served several churches. Then, after leaving Carlsbad Bible Church, my last pastorate, we spent several years attending the First Baptist Church in Carlsbad where we gained many friends and found opportunities for service. I was enjoying those opportunities until one Sunday night, January 4, 1999, when I realized that age-problems were affecting my voice, and I felt compelled to give up teaching a weekly Bible class. My voice simply would not hold out. That night I lay awake, and once again I thought about my sidewalk experience in Enid. There was no audible voice and no flashing light, but I was deeply conscious of the Lord quietly reminding me of a Sunday morning, July 24, 1932, more than 67 years earlier. That was the day I was baptized on the seashore in China. There Mr. Whitelaw, as he baptized me, challenged me with a verse in 2 Timothy 4:7, ***“I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.”***

“Be sure,” he said, “that when the time comes for you to meet Jesus, you will be able to say the same thing – that **you** have fought a good fight, that **you** have finished your course, and that **you** have kept the faith.” There in that dark night in Carlsbad those words came back to me. It was as if the Lord was speaking to me personally, “Paul, you have fought the good fight; you have about finished your course, and you have kept the faith!”

What an encouragement!

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Fast forward almost five years.

About Thanksgiving time, 2004, our family called us from Friendswood, Texas, where our daughters and their husbands, Margie and Jim Feaster, and Ruth Ann and Bill

Daughaday, live almost next door to each other. They expressed concern about our living so far from them at our age – I was 87 years old. Without our knowledge they had been looking for, and had found a suitable house close to them, and suggested we sell our home and move to Friendswood.

We saw the wisdom of the suggestion and contacted a real estate agent at once. She put up the “For Sale” sign on Tuesday morning, and the “Sold!” sign on Wednesday morning! All the arrangements moved smoothly, easily, and with phenomenal speed. We drove to Friendswood for Christmas, and while there our family helped us start the procedure for buying the house. Then we returned to Carlsbad and began preparing for the move. On Thursday, January 13, Ruth Ann and Jim drove to Carlsbad to help us move. On Saturday Ruth Ann drove us down to Friendswood in her car, while Jim drove the U-Haul truck loaded with all our worldly possessions.

When we arrived we were amazed at all our daughters and their husbands had accomplished, putting the house into excellent condition. The house is half again as big as our home in Carlsbad, and located on a very quiet street only two blocks from a main highway. We found the walls and woodwork painted, carpet laid, and most of the furniture in place. I have the finest study-office I have ever had, and Bernadine has an attractive “Piano Studio” where she teaches piano students. Our back yard is a small park with five large trees and skillfully landscaped with beautiful flowers. We could not be happier. We have contact with our wonderful family almost every single day, and they act as though the greatest thing they can do is to help us in every possible way.

Yes, our life together has in many ways been like that cross-country run, but now the goal is rapidly approaching, when we shall meet our Savior and Lord face to face. I am thrilled to realize that as we finish this race, “*we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses* (Hebrews 12:1)” Although I find myself unable to do all I would like to do, it is our desire to finish well. I have often thought back to that day on the sidewalk in Enid, and wondered that I could ever have doubted for a moment that our Father would provide for His children. Indeed He brought us through every step of our long lives, and now Bernadine and I can sing from our hearts with Fannie Crosby:

“All the way my Savior leads me:  
What have I to ask beside?  
Can I doubt His tender mercy  
Who through life has been my Guide?  
Heavenly peace, divinest comfort,  
Here by faith in Him to dwell;  
For I know whate’er befall me,  
Jesus doeth all things well.”

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