

GRADUATING FROM GOD'S ACADEMY OF GRACE
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Let us go on unto perfection (Heb. 6:1).

Space rockets are designed to explore the sky. Tremendous amounts of money and time are given to the project. for man hopes outer space will come within reach of earth. Similarly. Christians are meant to reach unlimited heights of spirituality and behold the wonders of God's sufficiency. When for one reason or another rockets fail to justify their existence, scientists suffer intense disappointment.

There are three kinds of space vehicles which suggest counterparts within the church. First, there is the rocket that fails to leave the ground. It never realizes its potential. It never flies. Secondly, there is the rocket that survives its countdown and ignition, flies for a time, then falls into oblivion. Thirdly, there is the vehicle that continues to ascend, and the higher it goes the more detailed are the pictures transmitted back to earth. Within every church, these types are found. Certain people profess faith but do not continue. Others exhibit great enthusiasm but after a short time their continuance abruptly terminates. There are some who continue to function, and the success of their efforts provides the utmost satisfaction. To change the simile, it might be said that within God's academy certain achievements precede graduation. and these are clearly defined in the Scriptures.

Looking at Christ... Confidently Welcoming

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith.
Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

John the Baptist was a special man chosen by God to be the herald of the King of Kings. His birth and early training were ordained by Jehovah, and in many senses he resembled Samuel who grew up under the supervision of the high priest. It was never revealed what happened in the desert, nor how God communicated with His young servant, but later in his life John confessed: "And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he

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which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:33-34).

The wilderness preacher had keen eyesight. and every day his eyes scanned the crowds. He was not aware of the identity of the Messiah. but anticipated His arrival. Then, one day he saw the Man from Nazareth. and it was as though a light had been turned on in his brain. When he saw the dove descending to sit upon the shoulder of Jesus. he knew this would be the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. John became one of the first to welcome the Savior. Faith is the first essential for all who would be a disciple of Jesus.

Listening to Christ... Contentedly Waiting

A certain woman named Martha received him into her house.
And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word (Luke 10:38-39).

Mary of Bethany was a contemplative woman and totally different from her sister. Martha was an industrious lady. very capable of managing her kitchen. Faith and works could be

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seen together every day in that hospitable home. When the elder sister informed Mary that guests had been invited for dinner, she did not realize that repercussions would disturb the tranquillity of the family. Mary became instantly fascinated by Jesus. and forgetting the necessity of being a hostess. she sat on the floor eagerly awaiting every word spoken. She had already welcomed the Lord into her heart and home. Now she wished to learn, and even the Lord was delighted to have such an attentive listener.

This is the second phase of Christian education. When the Savior enters into a life, He desires to be the center and circumference of it; everything should revolve around Him. A healthy Christian can never hear too much about Christ. whose words are a benediction and never a bore! When a man is too busy to listen to the Master, he resembles a space rocket that is about to crash! History teaches that all outstanding leaders of the church were devoted to the Scriptures. They believed "That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4).

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Living for Christ... Consecrated Walking

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself 50 to walk, even as he walked (I John 2:6).

The apostle John was annoyed. He had been opposed by a man who was obsessed with his own importance. His associates claimed to be Christians. but their conduct left much to be desired. When he wrote to Gaius. the apostle said. "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrophes. who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth. prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church" (3 John 9-10). It was inconceivable that he who had leaned upon the Lord's bosom should be opposed by a man whose criticisms divided an assembly. Some of the devoted brethren had been compelled to leave the fellowship. John was very indignant, and his words revealed the intensity of his feelings. Any person who claims to be a believer should be Christlike. Pious words are meaningless rhetoric unless they are spoken by loving people. Evidently Diotrophes was a man obsessed with himself. He did not understand that his conduct was outrageous.

It was to be expected that after Mary of Bethany had listened to Jesus, she would do what He suggested. The Lord said that if people loved God, they would keep His commandments. Men should be able to watch Christians and come face-to-face with the Savior.

Leaning on Christ... Conscientiously Worshiping

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved (John 13:23).

It may be significant that John was the only disciple who leaned upon the Savior's bosom. It may even be more indicative that none of the other men desired to emulate his example. Had there been someone else who wished to do so, he could have shared John's privilege. It is also extremely interesting to remember that this apostle survived longer than any of his brethren, and his guidance helped the churches to survive fierce

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persecution. John was not content to remain a yard away from his Lord, when it was possible to get closer. He was as weary as the others, but when it was possible to rest he leaned upon the bosom of his Lord where it became possible to feel heartbeats and hear quiet whispers. Did the remaining disciples dismiss John's act as sentimental? Were they too blind to recognize that the secret of tranquillity was found only in close proximity to the Savior? John would have appreciated the words of John G. Whittier who wrote:

Drop Thy still dews of quietness
Till all our strivings cease:
Take from our lives the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

Laboring for Christ... Consistently Working

We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1).

For we are laborers together with God (I Cor. 3:9).

Paul rejoiced in the company of young men for whom he was an example and guide. He never asked any of his helpers to do something he was unwilling to do himself. John Mark. Timothy. Silas, and Titus were all student companions of the great missionary, and others mentioned in the Pauline epistles were said to be "fellow-laborers" and fellow servants (see Phil. 4:3 and Col. 1:7). The apostle emphasized that "we are laborers together with God." It was always a privilege to work for the Lord, but it is infinitely better to work with Him.

If we may use modern terms, it means the employer is always on the job to counsel, direct, and help His servants. Even the most unlovely place on earth can become radiant when God is present. Mission stations in uncivilized parts of the world may seem like heaven when the presence of the Lord is recognized and enjoyed. Nevertheless, even the most dedicated missionaries may become dejected, lonely, and irritable if they forget that God shares every experience. Martha was very frustrated when she criticized her sister, yet when she began thinking about her

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Guest, the tension eased, and the kitchen became paradise. When Jesus commissioned the disciples to evangelize the world, He promised to be with them always. No worker for Christ need ever labor alone.

Longing for Christ... Continually Wanting

For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven: from whence also we look for the Saviour (Phil. 3:20).

The apostle Paul was convinced the Savior would return to earth and that human bodies would be transformed into His likeness. Pain, sickness, deformity, and age would disappear forever. Throughout history that fact has been the hope and inspiration of the church. At any moment during his illustrious career Paul would have gladly welcomed his Lord. Nevertheless, He was not content to sit idly waiting for that moment. He determined to "work while it was day for then night would come when no man

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could work." So well did he perform his ministry that, by the end of his lifetime the known world had heard the good news of salvation through Christ. He believed that "here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (see Heb. 13:14). To the Christians in Philippi, he wrote: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart. and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you" (Phil. 1:23-24). From the moment when he enlisted in God's army until the day he received his reward for meritorious service. Paul never faltered.

These six phases of Christian experience represent the complete life of a Christian warrior. (1) Looking at Christ; (2) Listening to Christ; (3) Living for Christ; (4) Leaning on Christ; (5) Laboring for Christ; (6) Longing for Christ. These are milestones along the Christian highway. Blessed is the man who at the end of the journey can say:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

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