

BodyLife Past Article Archive

It's So Worth It!

By Wayne Jacobsen

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Sara and I heard it over and over again as we struggled up the trail to Hanging Lake outside Glenwood Spring, Colorado. The trail winds uphill 1,000 feet in about a little over a mile. It's a tough climb with so little oxygen at 7,000 feet. But hikers who passed us going back down the hill kept encouraging us.

"Keep going."

"You're getting close."

"It's so worth it."

And it was!

Each word of encouragement lifted our spirits and lightened our steps as we traversed the rocky ground steadily climbing to the top of the cliff until we arrived at the waterfalls spilling into Hanging Lake and looked back out over the canyon we had scaled.

Learning to live relationally in an age where most of our perception of Christianity is based on religious thinking also takes even more encouragement. The writer of Hebrews says that 'daily' isn't too often to help others break free from their own efforts and the distractions that so easily entangle them to discover just how awesome living daily in the Father's love can be.

-The early steps on the journey are the most difficult, when other voices try to conform you to the rules of Christendom and you wonder if the passion in your heart makes any sense at all. Every time I grew weary, God was faithful to put someone in my path to encourage me. "This is the way!" "You won't be disappointed!" "God loves you more than you yet know." "You can trust him to get you through this." Each encounter left me confident that I wasn't as nuts as others seemed to think.

For those who have tasted of the joy and freedom of living in God's love and the depth of fellowship that happens without all the institutional overlays, perhaps the greatest gift we can give others is to encourage them through the toughest sections of the trail until the spacious place of living in God spreads out before them like a high mountain lake.

That's why I value most the letters I get from people who have read one of my books or an article from the website and say something like, "What I appreciate most about your writing, is not that you confronted

me with things I've never thought of before, but you put to words what God had been revealing to my heart for some time. Your words gave me the courage to trust what God was telling me."

I love that! What God is doing in this day to draw people to himself is not being led by any one person, or group of people. It is not a faddish reaction to a popular book. Rather, the Spirit of God is inviting people past the bondages of religious obligation to know him as he really is and to be transformed by his love so that they can reflect his glory wherever they go.

Encouraging others on that journey is the essence of body life.

Not Everyone Makes It

Two days after our hike to Hanging Lake we were headed up a more difficult trail to Booth Creek Falls outside of Vail. This one climbed 2,000 feet on a track that took us over two miles and started at 8300 feet. We had started early in the morning and didn't meet any other hikers on the way down. To make matters worse this trail was not marked as well and a few times we weren't sure we'd taken the right fork.

After hiking over an hour, we saw no sign of the falls. Had we missed it? Unsure how far we'd come, we debated whether to turn back and try a different fork. Finally, as we came out of the aspen forest to climb up a steep hillside we saw our first set of hikers coming back down the trail. It was a family of three and as we met I asked them if this was the way to the falls.

They said they thought it was, but added that they hadn't seen the falls. "We came to where we thought they should be, but it looked like they've dried up for the season." We were surprised and disappointed, but we told them we were going to press on anyway. We could hear water running in the canyon below us and couldn't believe the falls would be dry.

"We wanted to," one of them admitted, "but we're on a tight schedule." Then as they started back down the trail he turned to add, "If you find the falls, we don't want to hear about it."

A few hundred yards up the trail we think we found where they had stopped. We saw a rock formation that could have been mistaken for a dry waterfall, but the roar of water we could hear above us beckoned us further. In less than a hundred yards we came around a large rock outcropping and heard it before we saw it. Water plunged over the cliff and splashed 70 feet over the rock face to the creek below. What an awesome sight!

As Sara and I soaked in the moment, we couldn't help but think of the family we had passed. They had hiked over 2 miles to see the falls and had missed it by less than a hundred yards. Of course, they would never know, but we did.

I feel the same for believers that start out to discover what it means to live free in God's working and then

find the road longer or more difficult than they thought. When 'leaders' questioned their passion or when they felt uncertain about breaking their dependence on systems they'd come to trust, they scurried back to the security of the familiar.

I wish we'd met that family as they were coming up the trail. We would have told them about the falls and pointed out just where they were. That's what we did for everyone else we passed on the way back.

A Rest Still Waiting

In the last BodyLife I wrote about **The Third Road**, where we can discover true righteousness through a thriving relationship with Jesus, not through laws and human effort. It's amazing how few people end up on that road. Religion takes our best intentions to rob us of the joy of relationship.

If there is one recurring theme in the New Testament it is the danger of starting out on a journey to discover relationship with the Living God and end up side-tracked on a road to religious obligation. While it makes us feel good because we're working hard and seeming to achieve greater heights of spirituality, it actually is a trap that leads us into captivity. We mistake the right tradition, creed or discipline for engagement with his presence when in fact those things are but shadows of an even-greater reality.

When we returned from this second hike, I found myself reading Hebrews 3 and 4 where the writer talked about another group of people on a journey into God's rest. They didn't make it either. Trusting their own strength and wisdom instead of relying on God's, they never followed him long enough to discover his rest.

Thus, the writer of Hebrews concludes, there remains a rest for God's people. "Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his." After more than 40 years in Christianity, I am only beginning to taste a bit of what this means. I have tried so hard for so long to find the fullness of intimacy with God through my own efforts and diligence, and continued to be frustrated that my best efforts were not being rewarded.

But they weren't, because God had something better in mind. He wanted me to discover the freedom of trusting him. That journey would seem so simple, and in many ways it is. It's just that there are so many other things for us to put our trust in that we usually don't stay on that trail long enough to taste its fruit.

Those Who Have Gone Before

Thankfully, I've met a dozen or more people who are significantly further down this journey than I am. They live in the Lord's rest, not depending on their own power or ingenuity, they have found the peace and joy of cooperating with God's work and enjoying a friendship with him that is more real than any human relationship they have. Just to be around them is a great encouragement and helps fix my

compass for that which God asks me. I am blessed and challenged by how much they trust God to work things out with them and I am stirred by the depth of relationship and freedom they live every day.

They have found what those in Hebrews 3 and 4 missed. They trusted God enough to walk through the difficult and daunting stretches of the journey and found out that God really is all he says he is. He really does love them and can hold them up in any circumstance. They really don't have to perform to garner his affection or achieve anything to prove theirs.

At just the right times God has put people like them in my path when I needed a smile, a nod and the encouragement that this road, though painful at times, holds a glory far greater than I could imagine. "It's so worth it!"

Many of them read this journal and I want them to know how grateful I am that they have not only endured with him, but have freely shared their experiences, both good and bad, with me. I pray that you recognize people like that around you. I've no doubt they are there, but you can miss them if you live by appearances.

They won't often fit the mold our religious culture has taught us to look for, but God has them spread out everywhere. They won't have a model to implement, or a program to peddle, just the simple encouragement to keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and follow him wherever he goes!

That's the encouragement we all need and what our fellowship can do for each other.

It's Not Just A Dream

When Sara and I returned from the last hike we saw a mother and daughter lacing up their hiking boots in the parking lot. "Did you make it to the falls?" they asked with a touch of discouragement in their voices.

"We did," we told them.

"The people that came back before you said they didn't." We wondered if it had been the same family we met.

"No, they're up there," we said, "and well worth the hike. It's a tough trail but there are incredible vistas around every turn and the falls are gorgeous."

I want to tell you the same thing about this life in Jesus. Yes, the trail can be difficult, especially when people tell you that the life in Jesus you hope for is too idealistic. But what God has planted in your heart is not just a dream. It is the pulse of his heart calling you "further up and farther in." Don't listen to those who may have started down the trail, but either got side-tracked or didn't follow it far enough to discover the wonder of God's life. Listen to those who did.

Your freedom in God's life is not just something you dreamed, but what God created you for. Stay on the journey until you drink of it freely, and don't forget to encourage others as well. Sharing this joy with others is one of the best reasons he called us into his family.

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