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MONDAY MANNA
February 8, 2021

PERSECTIVES FROM TIME AND EXPERIENCE

By Jim Mathis

Observing my 72nd birthday several months ago caused me to pause for some reflection: I have seen the earth make 72 laps around the sun. Seventy-two years ago, I did not know which end of a camera to look through, how to hold a guitar, how to ride a bike, or even how to feed myself. When I was born, I could not even walk or talk. All of those skills I have acquired with much effort over the years.

But the process is unending. I could not hold a spoon 72 years ago, yet I am still learning about nutrition and discovering new foods and cuisine. I had to learn to ride my bicycle to the end of the sidewalk before I could consider going on a 550-mile ride. Life is about learning and growing.

Much has been written about the changes that have taken place in our world over the past seven decades. Technology has changed virtually everything we can touch. Instead of dwelling on the changes, however, I pondered some important things that have not changed. Here are some of my observations:

Integrity still counts. Being honest and fair in our dealings has been the bedrock of society for thousands of years, ever since humans began interacting with each. As Proverbs 10:9 observes, *“The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.”*

We are community creatures. We were made for each other. Attempts to isolate ourselves or build walls always end in disaster. This applies to individuals, organizations, and nations. We all have different experiences, skills, and personalities. We all need to work together, bringing our own gifts to the table, to have a thriving society and a decent world to live in. *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work.... A cord of three strands is not quickly broken”* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

We cannot be everything we want to be, but we can be more than we think we can. Twenty years ago, I spent time with famed music teacher, Jeff Newman. He said something I have never forgotten: *“Talent is the word used by people who don’t want to work to describe those that do.”* The Scriptures state it this way: *“All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty”* (Proverbs 14:23).

Who we are is determined by: who our friends are, the books we read, the music we listen to, and the TV shows we watch. It is not where we were born, or even innate abilities. It is about how we shape our minds. *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things”* (Philippians 4:8).

We can run a good race even starting at the back of the pack. The color of our skin, the quality of our schools, and the character of our parents may determine how we start in the race of life, but in a long enough race and with good coaching, those things do not matter much in the final outcome. Auto racing

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shows us the pole position may not always be the best place to start. *“The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty”* (Proverbs 21:5).

God wants us to see as much of His beautiful world as we can. Travel and experiencing other cultures, I have learned, is the one thing that breaks down prejudices, bigotry, ignorance, and small thinking. Seeing the world through the eyes of others makes a tremendous difference. The Bible gives this excellent advice: *“Do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others”* (Philippians 2:3-4).

© 2021. Jim Mathis is a writer, photographer and small business owner in Overland Park, Kansas. His latest book is *The Camel and the Needle, A Christian Looks at Wealth and Money*. He formerly was executive director of CBMC in Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri, U.S.A

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Regardless of how old we are, life can teach us important, even universal truths. What are some of the enduring lessons you have already learned in life?
2. What are skills you had to learn early in life – such as the simple things of walking, eating, and bicycle riding that Mr. Mathis cites – that have enabled you to do things you wanted to do later in life?
3. Why is it, despite the many technological and social changes we see and experience around us, that some things never seem to change? Do you think there are some aspects of the “human condition” that are unchangeable or immutable? Explain your answer.
4. In this “Monday Manna,” Mr. Mathis includes some Bible passages that affirm his observations? Can you think of any Scripture passages that have become especially significant for you over your lifetime?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
Proverbs 11:3, 13:6; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Ephesians 4:29; Hebrews 10:24-25, 13:

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