

We Press On

Several speakers at the recent Karns congregation men's retreat spoke with passion of their successes and failures in living the Christian life. As I listened to their stories (and recounted my own), it occurred to me that striving to live Christ-like lives is similar in many ways to hiking in the mountains in East Tennessee.

The trails in the Great Smoky Mountains usually start at a lower elevation and end at or near the top of the mountain. The trails are rocky and have tree roots and limbs crossing the trail every few yards. As one hikes the trail, the end is almost always shielded from view by the canopy of trees and brushes. Occasionally, one can catch a glimpse of a rock outcrop at the top through an opening in the trees. Hiking up a steep slope with a back pack is tiring and most have to stop to catch their breath and drink a few swallows of water. The end seems far away until you are almost at the top.

The hike to the top is accomplished by a slow steady pace while watching each footstep so as not to trip and fall. With the end of the trail obscure from eyesight, one can determine his/her progress only by looking down at the height gained and distance traveled. Even though the climb upward is tiring, there is peace and contentment that comes from observing God's creation in its essentially unaltered state. When the top is reached, the beautiful view and cool breeze causes you to forget the tired body. The goal justifies the effort required to reach the top.

In our Christian walk, we all start at the bottom. One moment we're separated from God because of sin and a short time later we were raised from the waters of baptism as a babe in Christ. As we begin our Christian travel, life becomes more difficult because of the decisions we are confronted with, and sometimes we stumble because of bad decisions and temptations that come our way. It is often difficult in our day-by-day interactions to maintain a positive attitude and to live peaceably with our brothers and sisters in Christ and our fellow human beings. Yes, sometimes we mess up and maybe even veer off the path. Our goal of going to Heaven and being in the presence of God is sometimes only faintly in our mind's view.

How are we to reach our goal when the obstacles in life wear us down? We press onward. *We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day* (II Cor. 4:16). We think as the apostle Paul, *Not that I have obtained, or am already perfected, but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me* (Phil. 3:12). And we will have the peace Christ gives, *the peace of God, that surpasses all understanding*' and we will not be afraid, as we pass through this life (Phil. 4:7, John 14:27).

For the elders (Don Denton)