

The Sad Truth About Our Society's Ignorance of Heb. 12:1

Legendary Coach Vince Lombardi had a famous saying, "Winners never quit, and quitters never win . . . once you learn to quit, it becomes a habit." If you compare the Christian life to a race, it is more like a marathon than a sprint. It's not about how fast you start, it's whether you finish. Jesus said, "He who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 10:22b). Hebrews 12:1b challenges us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us." There are many starters but few finishers. It is a good discipline to finish things you start.

Sadly, our society is full of quitters. In fact, we have special nicknames just for people who quit doing certain things. People who quit school are called dropouts. Parents who quit are called deadbeats. Patriots who quit on their country are traitors/defectors. Tax evaders quit paying Uncle Sam. Spouses who quit their marriage are divorcees. Outlaws are citizens who quit toeing the legal line. Christians who quit church are known as backsliders. And the list goes on and on. Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back at things is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). In other words, don't be a quitter!

Jesus was not a quitter. His final words on the cross were, "It is finished!" He completed the work the Father sent Him to do. Paul wasn't a quitter. As he awaited execution in Rome, he wrote, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, and I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). Noah wasn't a quitter, even though it took him 100 years to build the ark, all without power tools. Nehemiah wasn't a quitter either. When his opponent railed against his building project, he defiantly declared, "I am doing a great work, so I am not able

to come down" (Neh. 6:3). As a result, the wall around Jerusalem was rebuilt in 52 days. Jeremiah wanted to quit, but something wouldn't let him. "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name, then His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary of forbearing it, and I could not endure it" (Jer. 20:9). The prophet couldn't quit declaring God's Word.

It might surprise you that one of the New Testament authors was a quitter who later redeemed himself and had a profound impact on the early church. His Jewish name was John, but he was surnamed Mark and also known as Marcus. His mother, Mary, was a prominent widow in Jerusalem in whose home prayer meetings were held. He was also either the nephew or cousin of Barnabas, Paul's first preaching partner. He teamed up with them on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). Luke recorded, "And they had John as an assistant" (Acts 13:5). I can envision John Mark carrying cargo, running errands, making travel plans and arranging food and lodging for the apostles. Who knows, he might have even done some evangelism and teaching under their tutelage. Then, inexplicably, it happened. Mark abruptly quit!

Some speculate that, being from a wealthy family, he couldn't handle the rigors of the road. Perhaps he missed the comforts of home. Maybe he was too soft, too spoiled or too lazy. Some even accuse him of being a momma's boy who just wimped out. (His dad is not mentioned, indicating he was an unbeliever or may have died when he was young). Whatever the reason, Mark went AWOL.

About three years later, Paul and Barnabas embarked on a second missionary journey to revisit the cities where they established churches. Barnabas was determined to take Mark with them again. Paul said, "No way, nothing doing, that sorry quitter is not going with us, even if he is your kin," or something similar. Can you see those two missionaries in a heated debate, standing toe-to-toe, faces red, veins bulging

in their necks, voices growing louder and madder? You never knew preachers argued, did you? The division was so sharp between them that they parted company permanently. (Read it for yourself in Acts 15:36-40.) Barnabas and Mark sailed in one direction, while Paul and Silas went another. So two mission teams were formed from one due to a feud over a quitter.

Years passed, and Mark vanished from the biblical record. Then, over a decade later, Paul wrote to the Colossian church and commended Mark as one of his “fellow laborers” (Col. 4:10, Philem. 24). Then, in his last recorded words from a Roman prison, Paul makes a strange request, “Get Mark, and bring him with you, for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

Now wait a minute! Why would Paul summon the quitter? Remember, this is the same Mark that he washed his hands of, gave up on and refused to let travel with him. What happened? Obviously, there was a dramatic change in Mark’s life and attitude. He was heavily influenced and maybe converted by the apostle Peter, who called and considered him his own son in the Lord (1 Pet. 5:13). Though Mark was not an eyewitness of the works of Jesus, he retold the stories he heard from Peter in what is known as, yes, “The Gospel According to Saint Mark.” Wow! What a *remarkable* (pun intended) story of redemption. God took a quitter and turned him into a Gospel writer.

Church tradition claims that Peter sent Mark on a mission trip to Egypt where he founded a church in Alexandria, became its bishop and was martyred for his faith after winning a great number of converts. Mark’s life proves that once you’ve been a quitter, you don’t have to remain one. Paul must have forgiven Barnabas (he never disparaged him in any of his letters), and he must have realized he gave up on Mark too soon. That’s another lesson here—don’t give up on people. They may disappoint you, but they are never beyond God’s reach. Maybe

coach Lombardi was wrong. Even quitters can become winners.
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