

Discipleship: Behind Every Person – Roger Marini

Recently, I had the opportunity to attend a graduation ceremony at the local state university. A good friend of mine had gone back to school after a 10 year "hiatus" to finally finish his degree. The event was a fall semester graduation so I didn't expect a large crowd to be in attendance. But, the graduates numbered in the hundreds and well wishing parents, grandparents, and friends in the thousands.

Arriving later than most, I finally found a seat very far up and very far back in the coliseum. I sat down and began looking through the program, searching for the name of my friend, and found that his big moment was towards the end of the ceremony. As the sea of graduates lined up, and the announcement of names began, I settled back and began reading about the origin of the graduation robe, the history of the university, anything to pass the time. The endless drone of names provided a fitting background to what seemed to be the most boring of events.

(Luke 15:10 NASB) "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

And then I noticed that the almost endless stream of names reverberating through that place was punctuated by cheers, applause, ringing of bells, blowing of horns, even the clanging of pots and pans from the graduates' families and friends. From my vantage point, they were just small, black robed figures, marching ant-like down the aisle and across the stage. But, to those who cheered, this was the son, daughter, husband, wife, friend who was finishing the race. Some, like my friend, had taken longer than others. For some, there were more obstacles to hurdle; difficult classes, financial hardships, family responsibilities. But, in the end, it was worth all the suffering; the hard work, late nights, the things that were given up, the activities that were missed. Because now the goal had been reached!! This was a time to rejoice...and they did.

I was struck with the fact that while that graduation was going on, and even right now as you read this, an almost endless stream of names are being announced in Heaven. And there are cheers, applause, ringing of bells, blowing of horns, and maybe even the clanging of pots and pans as the redeemed are welcomed into glory. Some have made the walk, like my friend, after years of staying away. Some will walk without family waiting, the first in the long line of those who will put their trust in Christ. Martyrs for the faith, old men on calloused knees, those struck down in the prime of life, unborn children taken from their mothers' wombs, all being welcomed into His Kingdom by the angels and those who have gone before them. Will you be one of them?

Back in the 19th century, James Black wrote a hymn. Whenever that graduation ceremony comes to mind, I think of that hymn, especially the last verse..."Let us labor for the Master from the dawn till setting sun, Let us talk of all His wondrous love and care; Then when all of life is over and our work on earth is done, And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there."

Behind every person who crosses the line of faith, stands someone, or several someones, who shared the gospel message, gave them encouragement, and sometimes picked them up when they faltered. Friends who prayed, listened, and invested their lives in someone who was very important to them and to God. And, in the process, found that the giver was blessed as much as the receiver. That's how I feel about my friend. I'm glad that I had a small part to play in his

graduation, but I am really excited at how God is using me in his life. How about you? Who does God have in your life, right now, who needs to hear the gospel, or needs encouragement, or prayer. You can minister life to someone today. Yes you can. Did I stand up and cheer when my friend walked across that stage? Oh yes!! I just wished I had brought some pots and pans...or maybe a horn.