

Camp Meeting Preacher: A Challenge to Coasting Christians

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*Coast down the hill, and what happens when we don't start peddling again?
Pretty soon, we'll be at a standstill.*

- Randall Murphree

Unknowingly, I had catapulted myself into an extreme sport before that term had ever been coined. It was the mid 1950s. I was 10, and I just knew I was about to lift off from earth and launch into the sky as I let my bicycle pick up speed, coasting down the steep mile stretch of Highway 231 from Tolbert's Store. The wind roared by me stronger than I'd ever felt. What freedom!

It was the fastest my little 24-inch bike wheels had every turned. In a moment I'd be approaching the little dirt road to turn toward home, and as I began to apply the brakes gently, my handlebars started a wobble I couldn't control. I eased off on the brakes, the handlebars stabilized, and I braked again. The wobble returned.

In a matter of seconds, my mind searched for options. The long stretch of highway went on another half-mile beyond our road, and then it leveled off briefly and went down again before reaching a bottom and turning back upward. Fear gripped my mind, and my little-boy heart was doing double time. No chance of holding on until the terrain slowed down my ill-advised free coast. And no telling how many limbs would be broken when I crashed into the pavement.

What do I do? Try to keep going and praying? Head for the ditch? Fortunately that day, God watched over that foolish little boy – as He has done for seven decades now – and finally, my bike responded to the brakes without giving the handlebars a mind of their own!

Another kind of coasting

At the annual Hartselle (Alabama) Camp Meeting last week, evangelist Michael Mason talked about another kind of coasting. His sermon was based on Paul's admonition in [Philippians 2:12](#): "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (NKJV).

Bro. Michael wisely pointed out that Paul was writing to people who already professed to be Christ followers, so the text has nothing to do with that point at which we repent and come to faith in Christ. We don't "work out" our own plan of salvation – God's got that plan down pat. Paul's message was, "Don't quit." The preacher said Paul's call to "work out" our salvation is a challenge to keep going. Be like a miner in the diamond mines. He keeps digging, keeps looking until he has mined every valuable stone possible. Likewise with our faith, we must persevere, always digging into God's love and grace.

The evangelist pulled out his own memory of coasting on his bicycle when he was a kid. But unlike mine, his memory didn't summon up a near-death, extreme sport incident! No, Bro. Michael painted a word picture of short, gentle rises and falls of the roads around his home. Any child who ever had a bicycle probably has a memory of coasting down a short hill and picking up speed without peddling until the hill hit bottom, and an uphill climb brought the coasting to an end.

Ah ... and therein lies the application to our faith journey, the danger we put ourselves in when we coast too long. Coast down the hill, and what happens when we don't start peddling again? Pretty soon, we'll be at a standstill.

Many coasting Christians, the preacher said, once prayed faithfully, immersed themselves in the Word daily, served, taught, preached. But we're all prone to want to coast sometimes; I'm guessing ninety-nine percent of us have been guilty. And that brings us back to the point: We must not quit peddling – must not quit praying, must not quit studying or serving or teaching or using whatever gifts God has given us. Because if we quit peddling, quit working, quit pursuing God, we'll coast to a stop. And there's the danger – we may never start peddling again.

“At age 52, I'm still breathing,” Bro. Michael said. “That gives me the idea that God still has something for me to do. I don't know what's in store for me when I'm 60 or when I reach 70, but I don't want to miss it!”

Peddle on, Michael. And I want to be peddling right there beside you.

(Unless otherwise noted, the opinions expressed are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of the American Family Association or American Family Radio.)