

Be Sure It's Heard

By Jim Elliff

Yesterday, I read the first couple of chapters of author James A. Michener's *The World is My Home, a Memoir*. In his introduction he was explaining why he had chosen to complete this 500 plus page book at 85 years of age. Here's his explanation:



I have been impelled to attempt this project because of an experience that occurred eighty years ago when I was a country lad of five, and was of such powerful import that the memory of it has never left me. The farmer living at the end of our lane had an aging apple tree that had once been abundantly productive but had now lost its energy and ability to bear any fruit at all. The farmer, on an early spring day I still remember, hammered eight nails, long and

rusty, into the trunk of the tree. Four were knocked in close to the ground on four different sides of the trunk, four higher up and well spaced about the circumference.

That autumn a miracle happened. The tired old tree, having been goaded back to life, produced a bumper crop of juicy red apples, bigger and better than we had seen before. When I asked how this had happened, the farmer explained: 'Hammering in the rusty nails gave it a shock to remind it that its job is to produce apples'

'Was eight important?'

'If you're goin' to send a message, be sure its heard.'

[Michener (1907-1997) went on to mention his "rusty nails" — 'a quintuple bypass heart surgery, a new left hip, a dental rebuilding, an attack of permanent vertigo — and like a sensible apple tree, I resolved to resume bearing fruit.'

I'm not sure if Michener claimed to follow Christ (he did say he was a Quaker), yet his story is compelling. And eighty-five isn't such a bad year for forging ahead

in life. Remember, Moses was 80 (not 65) when he began leading the children of Israel in the wilderness from Egypt, and Caleb was 80 when he courageously took on giants in Hebron in Canaan. It can be done.

What's Ahead?

We might as well all admit it — we are getting older every day. And those years you and I are adding mean that we are getting closer to that time when we will retire. Then what?

I'm sure the word "rest" comes into your mind. And you should do some of that. For some that will be essential due to physical issues. For others, it is long-term dream. I get that and do not think that rest and some special experiences in life at that time are without merit. But the testimony of many is that having some useful activity is important for your spiritual and mental health, and it is certainly valuable for the Kingdom of God.

A Suggestion

Here is a suggestion about those years: offer your help to the pastors of your church. You may be able to do some significant service to relieve them and to bless the church by doing so.

You might help by visiting others in their homes or the hospitals, or perhaps, if inclined, you can throw yourself into mentoring others, or cleaning and fixing up various parts of your church building or the homes of people in your church who might need this help. You may be good at clerical work, or making calls, or running errands. You might be assigned to keep up correspondence with the missionaries your church supports (perhaps even traveling to them to give a firsthand report), or call on shut-ins. Or, you may be responsible to organize a prayer room or to meet with others as a prayer team. You get the idea.

And if God brings some rusty nails to get your started, let them move you on to your final years of loving service for our Lord, to whom you owe everything. They may be your best! After that, you will have eternity for rest and enjoyment in the next world.

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