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Going In Circles

By Duane V. Maxey

We have an acquaintance who had a little dog named "Snuffy" and that poor little critter spent his life "going in circles"! I scarce remember spending any length of time around "Snuffy" when he did not turn himself into a "Whirling Dervish" by chasing his tail -- and he did so with energy, speed, and growling snaps at that elusive tail! Further, I saw this little Chinese Pug do this from the time he was a tiny pup on up into his older life, and so far as I know, he continued spinning like a top either until he died or until he no longer could do so by reason of his age. I almost pitied "Snuffy," for as I recall he did manage to catch that little stump at least once and thereby inflict himself with a painful bite. Pathetic! -- and I marveled how he could continue to have such a vehement dislike for that tail and habitually chase it as he did in a little tan-colored whir and blur!

There have been some tribes of people who have also been addicted to whirling motions. One of my computer dictionaries defines a "Whirling Dervish" as: 1. "A member of any of various Moslem ascetic orders, some of which perform whirling dances and vigorous chanting as acts of ecstatic devotion," and as 2. One that possesses abundant, often frenzied energy: "She is a dervish of unfocused energy, an accident about to happen."

Whether one can be accurately classified as a "Whirling Dervish" or not, the fact is, all of life in this world is very cyclical, and long before the human "invention of the wheel," He Who "sitteth upon the circle of the earth" (Isa. 40:22) ordained it. Our globe is circular in shape and constantly spins upon its axis while it makes circuits around the sun. Wise, old Solomon observed: "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers

run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again" (Ecclesiastes 1:5-7).

Further, the usages of men are replete with expressions reflecting the cyclical nature of our existence. We speak of "Being in a Whirl" -- "The Merry-Go-Round Of Life" -- "Spinning Our Wheels" -- "Vicious Cycles" -- "The Wheels of Life" -- "the Daily Grind" -- "The Treadmill of Life" -- "Going for a Spin" -- and we use numerous other expressions that reflect just how much circles and circuits are a part of our lives. In the following, I shall endeavor to make a spiritual application relative to our "Going In Circles":

(1) GOING IN CIRCLES IN THE EDDY OF TIME:-- In a stream of water, an "eddy" is a current that veers off to the side of the main stream and moves in a swirling, circular motion. Sometimes these eddies create their own circular basin at the side of the main stream, and while objects in the current of the main stream flow onward, objects that are caught and trapped in the eddy may continue to make circuits in the same place indefinitely. (See the graphic accompanying this article.)

In his book, "The Simple Gospel" (See hdm0059), Bishop H. C. Morrison wrote: "Time is the eddy in the stream of eternity." The context of his observation follows:

REVOLUTION IS THE LAW OF TIME. -- Time is the MEASURED part of eternity, and nature is the clock-work for its measurement. Hence men look at the sun to know the time. Nature is in circles, and revolution is her law. The earth is a sphere, and God made it to revolve. The atmosphere is in a circle around the earth, and the electric current is her invisible belt. The ocean is only the "great waters" in ceaseless revolution. The heavenly bodies move in circles, the seasons chase each other in perpetual procession, day and night are in a circle. We sleep, and rise, go forth to toil, then return and sleep and rise again, thus we live in a ceaseless circle; life itself is REVOLUTION.

PROGRESSION IS THE LAW OF ETERNITY. -- Time is revolution -- round and round. Eternity is progression onward and ever onward. The eddy in the stream whirls and swirls in a circle, while the stream flows on. Time is the eddy in the stream of eternity. While living we whirl in the eddy, when we die we float out into the stream."

[This is a solemn picture indeed -- one that pictures Time as a mere whirling eddy beside the more powerful and ever-onward progression of Eternity's stream. It might be more appropriate to change the wording "when we die we FLOAT out into the stream" of eternity to: "when we die we are THRUST out into the stream"

of eternity! Having swirled about awhile in Time, whether we care to be, or not, we are thrust out into the onward, never-ending stream of Eternity.]

In his book, "Endless Retribution" (hdm0232), H. H. Hooker may have borrowed this thought from Bishop Morrison when he wrote:

The second set of laws to which I call your attention is the law of the revolution of time and the law of the progression of eternity. The law of progression of eternity begins in time and runs to all eternity but the law of revolution ceases with time. Time is the measured part of eternity. Nature operates in circles and revolution is the law. The earth is a sphere and God made it to revolve; the atmosphere corresponds to the circular sphere of the earth; the oceans are the great waters in ceaseless revolution lashing the shores of earth; the heavenly bodies move in circles; the seasons chase each other in circles. Day and night are running a circle constantly and man lives in circles. Time is revolution. Time is the eddy in the stream. The eddy may whirl and whirl, but the stream moves on. While revolution is the law of time, progression is the law of eternity. With the tree there was a change every year and a new circle was added, but in falling change ceased and it will never add another circle to its trunk, will never unfold its buds to the breath of spring or move its green foliage to the zephyrs of the wind. It goes from decay to decay. It progresses only in the state in which it fell.

When time is no more, the history of man on earth is completed, and redeemed humanity ascends to God, this earth will be refined by the fire of God. The machinery by which the earth kept up its rounds will be destroyed, and the law of revolution shall cease forever. The sun will be darkened and the moon will cease its circuit, the stars will put out their light, and the heaven and earth in their present conditions shall pass away. Peter said, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness" (2 Peter 3:10,11).

The sinner, having lived in sin and rejected the gospel, will pass from time, where change is the law, into eternity where immutability is the law, and enters into an eternal progression of the state in which he died. He had been growing in sin, hardening his heart in sin, ripening his life in sin, with his back to God, and going from Him all the days of his life. Spurning all efforts of God to turn him, he chose to have his back to God and to go from Him, so at last God lets the sinner have his own way, and says, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." In spite of all the restraining power of the laws of God and man, sinners produce

hell for themselves and others. What will it be when these laws are removed? It means that they will progress with a speed that is unbelievable in wretchedness and misery throughout all eternity.

The child of God will enter upon an eternity of progression in life, happiness, and bliss. Think of the happiest moment of your life, and then think that eternity will begin better than that and will increase as the ages roll on. No alternating of day and night, no ebb and flow of the tide, no revolution of the seasons, but eternal springtime and perpetual health and youth with onward sweeps toward grander heights as he explores the boundless expanse of eternity.

[The time fast approaches when, like it or not, every soul will be Divinely thrust out of the Eddy of Time into the endless and ever-progressing stream of Eternity -- to be always borne onward into either more and more bliss and peace or ever-increasing pain and torment. Such pictures of Time relative to Eternity are indeed solemn!]

(2) GOING IN CIRCLES IN THE EDDY OF AIMLESS LIVING OUTSIDE OF THE MAIN-STREAM OF GOD'S PURPOSE:-- In this analogy, I would liken the main stream to God's purpose for every soul in Christ, and the eddy to that aimless and useless existence apart from God's will. The following story is one of the illustrations found in the collection of "2700-Plus Illustrations" (hdm1880), is from Arthur Helps. He wrote:

Passing by a mountain stream, I once beheld an unfortunate tree log, which, having been cut down and shot down the side of a hill into a stream, thus to be sent on down the stream to find its way to the mill pond, had unfortunately come too near a strong eddy which caught it up and ever whirled it back again.

Down came the log with apparent vigor and intent each time, and it seemed certain that it would drive onwards in the course designed for it; but each time it swirled round and was sent back again. Ever and anon, it came with greater force, described a wider arc, and surely now, I thought, it will shoot down on its way; but no, it paused for a moment, felt the influence of its fatal eddy, and then returned with the like force it had come down with.

I waited and waited; groups of holiday-making people passed by me, wondering, I dare say, what I stayed there to see. Unmindful of any of us, the trapped log went on performing its circles. I returned in the evening. The poor log was still there, busy as ever in not going onwards; and I went upon my journey, feeling very melancholy for this tree, and thinking there was very little hope for it.

[When creating this collection, I placed a comment after this illustration:-- What Arthur "Helps" did not mention is that there is "help" to be found in Christ whereby one can escape being trapped in a back-eddy out of God's purpose and will for us. What the log needed was not a melancholy viewer, but a powerful actor. One who was equipped with the means and power to pull that log out of the grip of its trap could have freed it, and sent it shooting on down the main stream toward the purpose for which it had been chosen. Thus also, Christ has the means and power to free each one who is caught in the grip of purposeless circling outside of His will. Those who surrender to him are delivered from the satanic back-eddies of sin and are propelled down the main stream of His purpose for them in His kingdom.]

Let me now broaden my subject by presenting some different analogies regarding the subject of "going in circles". I hope that this mixing of my metaphors will not seem inappropriate to the reader, nor be confusing.

(3) SAVED FROM GOING IN CIRCLES AT SEA:-- The author of this story that appeared in a book of 1,000 illustrations that I owned wrote:

During the Spanish-American War, some transports with supplies for General Shafter's army found it impossible to secure anchorage off the coast of Cuba, and were compelled to steam slowly back and forth along the coast. This made it difficult to land the horses and mules, and it was finally decided upon to push them overboard and allow them to swim ashore.

So, they were pushed into the water and soon the sea was black with animals. Some instinctively swam toward the shore; others completed circles in the water; but others, more frightened than the rest, started out to sea. It was a distressing situation, and the ship's officers showed much concern.

Finally, the men who were aboard the transports espied a soldier on shore hastily making his way toward a rocky promontory. The stripes upon his uniform denoted the bugler. The jutting rocks reached, he raised the bugle to his lips and emitted one after another of the bugle-calls which the army horses and mules had learned to know so well.

The sound traveled far out to sea, and was heard by every bewildered, struggling creature. Instinctively, they turned and swam toward the call. The bugler stood there and sounded those calls until his lips were blue, but when he finally did cease, every confused and trembling animal was safe!

[Here we may observe that the preacher, God's Bugler, must place himself in a prominent place and lift up his voice like a trumpet if souls are to hear the

heartening and directing message of truth, head for shore, and land safely in Heaven. God's Bugler must also keep sounding forth the Divine Invitation until every last soul that he can thus rescue IS rescued!]

(4) SAVED FROM SUICIDE AFTER GOING IN CIRCLES:-- This is another illustration found in the 2700-Plus Illustrations collection:

The hymn "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" has been a source of great comfort and blessing to many of God's people since William Cowper wrote it in the 18th century. Yet few people know of the unusual circumstances that led to its composition. William Cowper was a Christian, but he had sunk to the depths of despair. One foggy night he called for a horse-drawn carriage and asked to be taken to the London Bridge on the Thames River. He was so overcome by depression that he intended to commit suicide. But after 2 hours of driving through the mist, Cowper's coachman reluctantly confessed that he was lost. Disgusted by the delay, Cowper left the carriage and decided to find the London Bridge on foot. After walking only a short distance, though, he discovered that he was at his own doorstep! The carriage had been going in circles.

Immediately he recognized the restraining hand of God in it all. Convicted by the Spirit, he realized that the way out of his troubles was to look to God, not to jump into the river. As he cast his burden on the Savior, his heart was comforted. With gratitude he sat down and penned these reassuring words: "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm. O fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head."

(5) THE NEED TO STOP GOING IN CIRCLES OUTSIDE OF SPIRITUAL CANAAN:-- This excerpt comes from "A Bundle Of Arrows" (hdm0029), By Beverly Carradine:

The Israelites were steadily marching through the years, but they got nowhere. With all their traveling, after thirty years and more, they would be no nearer Canaan than they were two or three decades before. They were going in circles. They doubled on their tracks. Their retreats equaled their advances. Their backslidings were as numerous as their forward movements.

What a strange sensation, yes, horror must have swept over them when they would come upon the remains of old campfires where they had abided a while long years before. There were the heaps of ashes, ends of unburned sticks, and even bones they had gnawed upon lying around. And lo! they had thought they were approaching Canaan!

Here is calamity indeed, to be ostensibly serving God, and yet really making no advancement and getting nowhere. To think that we are steadily progressing when we are simply going in rings. To be saying in class meetings for forty years that we are growing in grace, and yet no nearer Canaan or Holiness than then we started.

What a shock it must be to the man or woman who has not lost all spiritual life, and become a carcass in the wilderness, to suddenly come upon the camping place of ten, twenty, thirty, and even forty years ago! In other words, to find the same low state of grace, the same weakness in temptation, the same faultfinding and sensitiveness, the same disposition to take offense, and indisposition to forgive wrongs and injuries, lying round about in the soul. Here are the unburned ends of sticks, piles of gray ashes, and half-gnawed bones of a former camping place. Here we are back again. And the bones, sticks and ashes are so many sign posts, telling us that we have gotten nowhere; that we are still in the old place.

(6) GOING IN CIRCLES INSTEAD OF GOING WHERE THE HEART LONGS TO BE:-- This story comes from "Revival Incidents" (hdm0048), by Beverly Carradine:

While on the Pacific Coast several years ago, in one of my walks near the beach, I passed a small reservoir of water about twelve or fifteen feet in diameter and eight in depth. The wall of stone that encircled it rose a couple of feet above the ground, while a palisade of iron stakes crowned the abutment of rock.

In the pool lived the captive seal I write about in this chapter. Repeatedly I stopped and studied this creation of God with its sinuous beauty, dark glossy skin, powerful flippers that were neither feet nor fins, and its marvelous swiftness of movement as it rushed around in circles under the water.

I was especially struck with the fixed gaze that the seal for minutes at a time would bend upon the distant horizon over the limitless expanse of waves. I could all but feel that look of the solitary creature as with body poised above the water and uplifted head it fastened its eyes on the far away view of sunlit billows and that remote line where the sky touched the sea, and beyond which lived and gamboled in the great deep, herds and schools of its own kind, from whom it had been separated for long weary months and perhaps years.

After one of these prolonged looks the seal would suddenly dive deep in the pool and for minutes rush with the speed of a whirlwind round and round the circular sides of its prison house as if it was escaping and getting back to its distant tribe, former life and long unbeheld home.

Oh, how it would cleave the water, and with evident desperation of energy try to cross that wild waste of waves that it beheld through the iron paling. Then it would rise again, fix the eyes once more for minutes on the ocean and sky line that seemed no nearer, and still again repeat the plunge, dive and rush around in the pool.

I confess to being greatly moved at the spectacle, and fancied that I could see back of the pathetic, black eyes the yearning of the creature for its own tribe and household, and mark the disappointment and wonder that its last struggle and swift course under the water had not brought it any nearer to the distant, flashing waves, nor in sight or touch of its companions that by the law of nature it craved to see, live and die with.

In addition to the melancholy impression made upon me by the captive I obtained several lessons.

One was from the look of the seal.

I have seen a gaze kindred in character many times in human life itself and from very different walks and conditions of men.

The prisoner in jail or penitentiary knows it. The exile from his native land, although not writing a page, feels volumes as to what is in that gaze. The banished Marius said to a couple of messengers, 'Tell the people of Rome that you saw Marius sitting in the ruins of Carthage.' It requires but little imagination to conceive the expression of face, and the sorrowful eyes looking beyond the Mediterranean sea towards Rome, and all that must have been in the heart of the speaker.

(7) GOING IN CIRCLES IN THE PULL OF A WHIRLPOOL:-- This story is taken from "Present Day Parables" (hdm0072), by J. Wilbur Chapman.

On the coast of Norway there is an immense whirlpool, called by the natives Maelstrom, which signifies the navel, or the center of the sea. The body of waters which form this whirlpool is extended in a circle about thirteen miles in circumference. In the midst thereof stands a rock, against which the tide, in its ebb, is washed with inconceivable fury, when it instantly swallows up all things which come within the sphere of its violence. No skill of the mariner nor strength of rowing, can work an escape. The sea-beaten sailor at the helm finds the ship, at first, go in a current opposite to his intentions; his vessel's motion, though slow in the beginning, becomes every moment more rapid; it goes round in circles, still narrower, till at last it is dashed against the rock, and entirely

disappears forever. And thus it fares with the thoughtless and hapless youth that falls under the power of any vicious habits. At first he indulges with caution and timidity and struggles against the stream of vicious inclinations; but every relapse carries him down the current, the violence of which increases, and brings him still nearer to the fatal rock in the midst of the whirlpool, till at length, stupefied and subdued, he yields without a struggle, and makes shipwreck of conscience, of interest, of reputation, and of everything that is dear and valuable in the human character.

(8) GOING IN CIRCLES TOWARD THE END OF LIFE:-- This excerpt is taken from "Mastering Our Midnights" (hdm0564) by Russell V. DeLong, the part titled: "What Then":

What's your next move? After that, What then? Is your life a disconnected series of jerks toward no definite end? Or is your life merely a "Merry-Go-Round," going in circles -- going nowhere -- just going?

You say, "I must be doing something."

What?

"Oh, anything. I must be going places and doing things"

Whirl is king. Doing is more important and attractive than either thinking or being.

The lives of some people are empty, meaningless, and purposeless. They are just existing. Like animals, they eat, drink, sleep, and move around -- going nowhere in particular and doing nothing on purpose.

Then there are others who are going somewhere and doing some things in order to attain certain goals.

One young man wants to get a job. Why? To earn some money. For what? To buy a car. Why? He likes to speed. So he gets a job, works, gets money, buys a car, and speeds. What then?

Another young man goes to high school. Why? So that he can qualify for college. Why? He finishes college so that he might enter law school. Why? That he might pass the bar examinations and become a lawyer. Why? He wants to become district attorney. Why? That he may be elected governor. What then? He'll run for senator. And then what? Maybe, President. After that? Retire. What then? Old age. What then? Death. What then?

Any avenue one takes eventually leads step by step to death.

One makes a million dollars. He meets death and leaves it. What then?

One achieves great political power -- relinquishes it and faces death. What then?

One scales the heights in Hollywood and becomes an idolized star; loses beauty, health, and vitality; fades away into obscurity and dies. What then?

One travels to faraway places, sees spectacular phenomena, visits the shrines of antiquity, and mingles with people of all colors, races, and religions. Then weakens and dies. What then?

Money, fame, popularity, power, education, and position all reach their peak -- then the descent and finally the river of death. What then?

This sermon does have a pessimistic note. And yet it is important. If death is the end, pessimism is the correct philosophy. We are prisoners, all serving a death sentence. There is no escape.

Without immortality life is a pessimistic, if not diabolic, madhouse.

(9) GOING IN CIRCLES BECAUSE OF A POISONED PASTURE:-- This story is taken from "A Farmer Looks At The Parables" (hdm1498), by John F. Dorsey.

One day I noticed a lamb running in circles -- getting nowhere but into exhaustion. Another was walking around with its nose pointed up in the air. I called the vet. "Sugar deficiency," he said. I bought some molasses feed. No improvement. I went to the county agent's office. "What do you have on diseases of sheep?" He started pulling out the booklets. Here it was. Here was the trouble. Everything dovetailed for tetanus, except my lambs did not have locked jaws. I kept on looking. Forage poisoning -- everything dovetailed.

I went over the pastures from then on, eliminating milkweed, nightshade, snakeroot, water hemlock and young burdock. The problem disappeared...

Has the pastor any responsibility to warn his people about poisonous literature? He certainly does! It can ruin their appetites, as can worldly music and worldly entertainment.

(10) GOING IN CIRCLES BECAUSE OF STRONG DRINK:-- This is taken from "When God Taps Your Shoulder" (hdm1543), by Fletcher Clarke Spruce, and entitled: "The Intoxicated Cat":

Jack Barron tells the story of a man who played a trick on his cat by mixing whiskey with the milk in the saucer. The cat began to dance around like mad, stagger in circles, and finally fell in a heap in the corner and went to sleep. Soon the cat began to lose his hair. He acted weirdly and looked a fright. Someone wrote the newspaper a letter about the affair and the letter was published. Soon letters from everywhere began pouring in, condemning the man for his inhuman treatment of dumb animals. Readers denounced the owner of the intoxicated cat with suggestions of cruel punishment for a cruel man who fed liquor to his cat. Give an animal liquor and you are considered cruel. But give a man liquor and you are considered sophisticated. Let an animal stagger, reel, act foolish, fall in a drunken stupor and immediately aroused readers from coast to coast howl in protest. But let a man stagger, reel, act foolish, fall in a drunken stupor, and we simply ignore it. We condemn the man who gives liquor to his cat, but we vote for the man who legalizes the sale of liquor to your son and daughter. We write letters to complain about someone offering liquor to an animal, but we offer it to our children through the magazines, on the billboards, in the newspapers, and in mile-long letters in the sky. It is not fit for your cat but it is just the thing for your son and daughter!

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THE CONCLUSION:-- In what appears to be an attempt at humor, someone has written: "Blessed are they that do run in circles, for they shall be called 'wheels.'" But the God-ordained circles for us in this life are no joke, and that "going in circles" which is created by satan should also be looked upon with the utmost sobriety. Doubtless it would be wise for every soul to seriously consider the various circles in which his or her life is even now moving -- noting the cause, the course, and the ultimate end of each.

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END OF THIS ARTICLE