

MARK'S REMARKS

Last month we left with the image of a rebellious and stubborn Black Angus being 'led' off a horse trailer with a frustrated teenager attempting to hold on. While many of you have imagined the rest of this tale, I must warn you, if you are hoping for more of the same, you are going to be disappointed.

Upon exiting the horse trailer, a new untried environment greeted this steer. He saw other lead calves accepting their 'right of passage', heard unfamiliar sounds of people and carnival music, and I suppose smelled hogs, cattle, chickens, and horses among hot dogs, taverns, and cotton candy. Like a freshman in college who suddenly realizes the world is much bigger than the one they have always known, this steer was a mixture of apprehension, shock, and astonishment.

It was as if someone turned off a switch. Within a short time the tension that had strained his rope for the past few months fell. Remember his fondness of snorting and tossing his head? That previous weapon now rested against my forearm. As I led him, yes I was actually leading him, he remained close; no tension, no struggle, no planting of all fours.

And this pattern continued throughout the week. When I would feed and water him, he seemed to welcome me with these thoughts, "Thanks for the cool clean water and fresh mixture of feed, but it *sure* is good to see a familiar face in this place." I still am amazed at the transformation that took place within this steer. And to remain consistent, a conversion I doubt swine are capable of pulling off 😊.

The day we entered the show ring was pure joy. Obedient, he stood well, followed close, kept his head high, and periodically in need of assurance, touched that big black head to my arm. Having won our class, we found ourselves in the championship class and while we did not place high enough to be considered for Best of Show, we represented ourselves well. All the training, bruises, frustrations, and upraised fists faded in the distance. This splendidly chiseled animal carried himself proudly and at the same time, revealed to all his 'fans' how he had learned to enjoy the pleasures that come with submitting to his master.

The hardest part of that 4-H year was selling this animal. The first days of training you could have bought him with a deed to a beachfront house in the Sahara Desert but on the August day I sold him, betrayal seemed to flow through the air. Emotions of a teenager are hard to predict. This steer had done everything I had asked of him and more. And to parade him around the show ring that had now become a sale ring was difficult. While I was aware what lay ahead of him that afternoon, he trusted, completely unaware. I wish I could have found a hole in the fence to take him through as opposed to removing his halter, slapping him on his back, sending him up to the cattle truck. Through tears, I wished for him rolling hills and sprawling green pasture.

Seems to me, respectful and meaningful relationships grow through trials and frustrations. Certainly they are nurtured by time spent together. And while not always consciously aware, trust and respect begin taking root and it is in the approach of uncertainty and uncharted territory, a person suddenly realizes these relationships are what we need to face the future. Thoughts of past disappointments and doubt, wondering if the goal is worth the effort, are forgiven.

In addition we are called to follow our Master. He leads, we follow. He forgives, we welcome forgiveness. Offering His mighty right arm, we are invited to rest upon it. He knows the future, we know to trust. He provides water, we deeply drink it in, grateful not only for the quenching of thirst, but for His presence. He promises to lead us to a *glorious* end, one of perfection. Vivid color, lush, weed-free green pastures, deep rushing water, and perfect fellowship. No halters needed.

Are we nurturing the relationship? Do we trust him enough to follow? Are we still in need of a halter? Is the rope taut? The Lord would love to remove this device of training, cast it aside, and have us walk *with* Him out of love, trust, and admiration.

Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. (Psalm 143:8-10)

With halter sores,

Pastor Mark