

Daily View

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13

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One Route to Maturity

I had a paper route or four when I was young. While hiring young kids to toss papers on driveways is a thing of the past, I imagine even young people know what it is because, every now and then, you see a “paperboy” throwing newspapers in a movie or TV show. My experience was sort of like that pictured above except that I did it mostly in the dark, and without the dog.

I had my first paper route when I was barely 11 years old, living in Vallejo, California. At that time, Vallejo was a town of about 60,000, the home of Mare Island, where nuclear submarines were being built during the Cold War in the late 50s and early 60s.

Vallejo was not the safest place to live. The city even cancelled Friday night high school football games due to racial unrest and rioting. But that didn't keep my parents from allowing me to get up at 4:30 AM every morning to fold papers, tuck them in my canvas paper bag, climb on my bike and ride around town, tossing them on the driveway or the porch. They gave us a few extra papers in case we accidentally tossed one in the flower bed or on wet grass.

My parents insisted on the importance of working hard and of taking responsibility. One early morning I was riding my back with my papers and the top tube snapped right in half. My bicycle was now two unrideable unicyles. When I called my house my dad answered and when I told him what happened he just said, “alright...” That was it. He expected me to figure it out — to put the bag over my shoulder and finish the route. Dad was fond of proverbs like Proverbs 12:24, “the hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor.” My father had a “no sloths allowed” policy. That could have been the saying on our welcome mat

on our front porch. See Proverbs 10:26; 15:9; 19:24; 21:25; 26:14-15.

Paperboys were not only responsible for delivering the papers but also for collecting the monthly subscription fees as well. We were 11 year old businessmen... boys. At the end of the month, I went to each house on my route, knocked on the door and said, “Hi. I'm collecting for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.”

Most everyone was nice and paid on the first visit; some even gave me a tip. One family, however, would never answer the door, no matter what time I went to collect. I knew they were there because I could hear the TV. I was getting exasperated. If a subscriber didn't pay, it came out of my pocket. After several failed attempts to collect, I wrote a note and tucked it into the folded newspaper. It said, “If you don't pay for your sub *I will have to take drastic measures.*”

When I told my mother what I wrote, she had a hard time not bursting out in laughter. When she collected herself, she asked, “So, David, what exactly are the ‘drastic measures you plan to take?’” I didn't have an answer for that. I was like a tiger growling at a victim only to find that the tiger had no claws and no teeth. However, the next time I knocked on the door, the people answered and paid the monthly sub fee. I'm not sure what I would have done if they called my bluff.

I had other paper routes after this. I threw papers from a Honda 50 motor bike and, later, a couple of times from a car. But the Vallejo experience taught me a few lessons about responsibility that would have been hard to come by without it. It's too bad that kids today don't have that option. Taking responsibility that early on is a valuable lesson that I'm glad I had the opportunity to experience.