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Aspiration(s)

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Aspiration(s)

Abstract

"Achievement requires something outside of who we are, something like grace."

Posting about aspiring to achieve from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/aspirations/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

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 [inallthings.org /aspirations/](http://allthings.org/aspirations/)

November 27,
2016

James Calvin Schaap

Daily Scripture Readings

[Psalm 122](#)

[Isaiah 2:1-5](#)

[Matthew 24:36-44](#)

[Romans 13:11-14](#)

This time of year especially, around here it's not difficult to stumble into bona fide champions. In this corner of the country, they're all around—volleyball, football, cross-country. Winners look alike, not only during post-game piling on, but already before the clock starts its ticking. Their billowing aspiration shows in their face because aspiration is not just an asset, it's a precondition—a testimony.

Aspiration drips from three of today's scriptures. What people wanted more than anything, what they aspired to achieve is at the heart of the pageant they're creating.

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.” (Isaiah 2)

I rejoiced with those who said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the Lord.” (Psalm 122)

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (Romans 13)

Aspiration is a fire in the belly, a head full of selfless dedication, a heart brimming with passion. Without it, once the smoke clears, you end up at the bottom of the standings.

All of 150 years ago and not all that far from here, a Mennonite immigrant named Peter Jansen, little more than a kid, set up a homestead claim so far out into nowhere that a 20-mile trip to town brought him past only one other sod dwelling. He and his brother, both single, were nothing if determined, full of aspiration to build a kingdom on uncut prairie.

But their oxen were rookies just as they were, their plow was sticky-new, and, truth be told, neither of them knew much about breaking unbroken ground or running a team.

One unbearably hot afternoon Peter Jansen's oxen got ornery and hauled Jansen's brand new plow with them, belly deep, into a nearby slough to cool off.

In his immigrant memoir, Jansen says he was so “thoroughly disgusted” he sat down in the field and almost started bawling. He couldn't help wishing he'd never left Russia.

Just then some distant neighbor he didn't even know just happened by. “Trouble?” this old neighbor asked.

Jansen had more trouble with the English language than he did explaining the oxen cooling off in the slough. That he was ready to throw in the towel on farming this overheated land was perfectly obvious.

Jansen says this stranger/neighbor didn't hesitate. "Take off your trousers," the old guy said, "get in there and plow yourself out." And then came the magic words: "I'll help you lay off the land and get your plow a'going."

". . .Which he did," Jansen wrote, "and so started me farming."

Without aspiration, we'll never get to the far end of the field. But breaking new ground on the sweltering days of our lives always requires more than what we are or can generate ourselves. Achievement requires something outside of who we are, something like grace.

I, for one, sometimes wish I had David's sweaty aspiration for "the house of the Lord." Nothing thrilled him more than worship. I'm envious. I wish I had Isaiah's hefty caliber of faith as he charges up the mountain to "the temple of God."

But then I'm old enough to have learned that even faith is a gift not unlike a stranger in the middle of nowhere who comes, like a savior "to get your plow a'going." Only faith will get us there, and faith itself is a gift.

Our wins are all about Him. Our sweatiest aspiration still stands in need grace, doesn't it?

About the Year-Long Devotional Series

You can think of it as a series of short sermons if you'd like, or else a long line of personal testimonies—that's okay too. But I'm hoping this year-long series of meditations will be more like a friendly conversation, a goodly number of people who hold fairly similar views of God and his kingdom, each of them, day by day, reflecting on God's revealed Word. It's a place for us to talk to each other about what we believe and how, so that each night or morning or afternoon we just listen and think and pray. With each other, we'll make devotion a habit, a discipline, listening to familiar voices living through and in the scripture.

Special thanks to all who've signed up to participate. We all look forward to listening to a hundred voices singing—all of us—from the same book. May what is said here enrich our lives and glorify the name of our Lord.—*James Schaap*