I am Joe's Toes

John Faber

I am Joe's right foot. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I consist of many bones, strong muscles, and have an arch which separates the heel from the toes. My bones have strange names: tarsus, metatarsus, and phalanges. Joe is a heavy man, weighing over two hundred pounds; but when he walks, each of us carry that weight alone. When he wants to reach a high shelf in the closet, I can raise that hulk another few inches with ease. When Joe jumps down from a chair, I touch my toe end first to take up the jolt, thus protecting my heel from injury. I am a physical mechanism of many functions, the chief being locomotion. When Joe was a baby, he crept on hands and knees, but soon learned to stand upright and to take a few faltering steps. How proud he was when I learned to keep him in balance, to take steps from chair to chair to mother's outstretched arms! I also led him into mischief by giving him opportunity to reach up to tables tops, but by then it was taken for granted: little Joe could walk! So, breakable things had to be put out of reach.

I am quite an important part of Joe's anatomy. My name has been taken up into Joe's language as metaphors. When one is near death, he is said to have one foot in the grave; he speaks of a new movement being on foot; he makes a good impression by putting his best foot forward: when he takes a firm stand on any issue, he puts his foot down. When he or his friends make an embarrassing blunder, it is said that he puts his foot in it. He foots a column of figures; when he gets a secure position, he has a foothold; and when his relationship is well established, it is said to be on good footing. The young man who is free to travel without responsibilities is said that he is a footloose; and when Joe wants to proceed quietly, he goes on tip-toe.

I and my left partner are somewhat like the front wheels of a car-the way we point, so goes the rest. We determine whether or not to remain on the pavement, or swerve into the ditch. The way I point, that is where Joe goes. We get the blame for his waywardness: "His little feet get him into more trouble!"

When Joe was a lad, I led him to Sunday School, to church, to catechism class, to the Christian day school. But when he grew up to young manhood, this became harder and harder to do. He occasionally skipped classes; and he even steered me past the church entrance to indulge some "free time", I and my left partner began to realize that we were not steering Joe at all; he was "at the wheel" and directed our steps. Joe did not always "keep sound wisdom" and therefore would cause me to stumble. He sometimes turned right, and then left from the straight and narrow path and did not remove me from evil. He would sometimes be guilty of doing what the Lord hates, causing me to "be swift in running to mischief". Sometimes we took him into places of wickedness; movie theaters, bars and other low dives. Instead of walking to the bookcase to pick up a good book to read, he would direct me to the T.V. corner and switch it on to be connected with and surrounded by the world of evil. Instead of studying for school or church activities, he would steep his thoughts in the way of entertainers who do not like to "retain God in their knowledge", and whom "God gave over to a reprobate mind to do things that are not convenient". Joe became a slave to the wiles of the devil as they were portrayed by wicked men and women; all the while "knowing the judgment of God that they which commit such sins are worthy of death". Joe, sad to say, also "had pleasure in them that do them"!

Then I came to realize that Joe wasn't really "at the wheel", but Satan, the arch-enemy of God was driving him. Poor devil-driven Joe!

Now Hear This! The pastor of the church in which Joe was member by baptism invited Joe to come to his study for a talk. The evening that my partner and I took him into the presence of the pastor was the beginning of a new walk for us! The man of God opened Scriptures to Joe, applying them to his deviant walk; prayed with him – and was heard! Joe was turned completely around! Our steps "were enlarged under him" so that we did not slip. Joe began guarding us so that he did not "dash us against a stone". Now Joe can walk before God in the land of the living! Joe has been renewed so that his soul is holden in life that he "suffereth us not to be moved". Now Joe sings with the church: "I have refrained my feet from every evil way that I might keep thy word". And, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light upon my path". The almost un-noticed sign at stairways in public places, "Watch your step" has found a new meaning to Joe.

What a radical change in the duty of directing Joe! We left and right partners took Joe to the consistory room to make confession of faith. We took him to the front of church to make that confession public. We took him to the Communion Table and we are confident that, in our resurrected state, we will take him along the "Streets of Gold" in the New Jerusalem! Thrice happy Joe!

Originally Published in:
Vol 38 No 2, April 1979