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In a Rut?

Are you a creature of habit whose every behavior is measured, predictable, and planned? Although we might like to fancy ourselves to be creative and original thinkers whose choices and acts could not be readily anticipated by others, in fact, most of us cannot help ourselves. We're in a rut.

As the famous physicist Isaac Newton once noted: "Everything continues in a state of rest unless it is compelled to change by forces impressed upon it." And though Newton was referring to theoretical physics' understanding of the movement of objects, we suspect his principle has ample application to human lives, as well. The truth is, most of us are unwilling or unable to change much about ourselves, unless compelled to do so. We stick with the status quo.

A fascinating theory exists about how the width of railway tracks was determined, which provides a clear demonstration of the human tendency to maintain the status quo. Here's the theory. The standard distance between rails on a train track is four feet, eight and one half inches. Why such an odd number? That's the width between rails in England, where pioneering railroading occurred. And why was that width used in England? Because the first rail cars in England were built by wagon builders who produced wagons with wheels this standard distance apart. And why was that the standardized wagon width in England? Because ancient wheel ruts throughout Europe had been worn into the roads at the width. And why were the old ruts that width? Because the roads were built and used by the Roman legions whose chariots made parallel ruts that distance apart. And what determined the width of the Roman chariots? Roman chariots were built to a standard size of four feet, eight and one half inches because that was the combined width of the rear ends of two Roman war horses.

Fascinating theory, isn't it? And it's not hard to imagine that it just might be true. After all, aren't we all locked into old habits, perhaps some we didn't even really choose to adopt for ourselves? Aren't we all stuck with some beliefs or expectations or attitudes that just don't seem defensible anymore, although we've just hung on with the old patterns?

One of the most significant aspects of the life of faith is that it tends to nudge us out of our comfort zones, refusing to allow the status quo to become the only acceptable goal. The life of faith pushes us to look deeply at ourselves and our world and ask how things came to be, whether they should remain as they are, and if they should change, how we can help to see the transformation begin.

And perhaps the most important changes we will ever undertake are the needed changes to ourselves. If we have gauged our lives on old, outdated, irrelevant patterns, we might want to re-think what a newly faithful pattern of life would look like. Think of the new shape our lives would take on if we became more generous, or more forgiving, or more accepting, or more loving, or more tolerant, or more positive.

Maybe a whole new, transformed life is waiting for you! You just need to get out of that rut.