

No Foot, No Horse

At a gallop, this steed will go nearly 40 mph. Weighing in at 1,200 pounds, he will exert approximately 48,000 pounds of pressure (mass times velocity) on each hoof. To top it off, the gallop is a 4 beat gait, thus all of this force is expressed on one hoof alone at a time, and amazingly repeated stride after stride, year after year. A horse's hoof is one of the most amazing components designed by God. The hoof and its entire circumference can measure in the area of about ten square inches. Now, this wouldn't be too bad if that meant that there were 4,800 pounds of pressure per square inch, except that the primary part that absorbs the pressure is the hoof wall, which is a solid ring around the outside of the hoof, and is held to the interior structure by a velcro lining called the White Line. Something of incredible nature must occur on the inside to allow this horse to receive such an impact, repeatedly, with strength and resilience. To fully appreciate the dynamic of God's design, we must see it on two planes. The vertical and lateral planes have three components within the hoof itself that contribute to its success. The first is the vertical plane of the bone structure and the movement of the bones; second, is the absorption of the impact by the plantar cushion; and thirdly is the lateral expansion of cartilage by the movement of the heels. (Be patient with me if you are not a horse person, for you will appreciate its application.)

First of all, the hoof and the ankle area are comprised of many small bones that are both able to give structural strength and flexibility. Nothing better illustrates living in truth more than the articulation of the bones. When Pilate asked Jesus what is truth, though Jesus did not answer him there, He did answer it at other times by saying that "I am truth. Truth is not just empty doctrine or facts; it is the character of God, demonstrated through right relationship. Jesus said that if you see Me you have seen the Father. The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the brightness of God's glory, the exact representation of His nature. Therefore, He represents the full heart and character of God, but in harmony with His Father, Himself and those whom God has called Him to serve. This was not an empty doctrine but a living reality. In like manner, these bones are not dead sticks, but living tissue with strength and flexibility, in harmony with each other.

The second unique element of the hoof is the thick gristle-like substance called the plantar cushion. Without this healthy substance, the bones themselves would go right through the hoof or the stones would penetrate through the thin lining of the sole. But, each time the foot makes an impact, tremendous concussion is absorbed by the plantar cushion, minimizing the impact on the bones and the skeletal structure throughout the entire body. The next unique factor of the hoof is that the coffin bone, which is the primary bone inside the hoof, is composed primarily of bone, but has wings on both sides called the lateral cartilages. Every time the hoof descends and makes contact, the impact is diffused by the heel of the hoof spreading to the outside laterally.

These three dynamics illustrate the very essential workings of a healthy believer in relationship to his heavenly Father, his own personal worth, and unique fitting in the body of Christ. First, in order for any believer to have lasting success, they must be founded in truth, not just knowledge, but a healthy relationship to the living Word of God. Living in harmony with God's word, one's conscience, and the people with whom God has placed them, requires much change and daily adjustments, stride upon stride, day by day.

Absorption of the external impacts- criticism, neglect, anger, etcx, requires every person to diffuse this pain through the process of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not changing the outside world; it is a means of wisely processing the impact from the world, by turning its intended pain into power. In fact, the hoof is known as the second heart of the horse. By absorbing the concussion, it forces the blood back up the veins to the heart. Therein, also, is the heart of the believer seen and revealed through one's response to external concussions. The lateral cartilages clearly express the horizontal bar of the Cross, implying the believer's need to be fitted effectively into the body of Christ in service, witness and fellowship. Only if these three (the articulation of the bones, absorption by the plantar cushion, and expansion of the lateral cartilages) work in harmony can the horse successfully perform.

In addition to the horse's unique interior design, the hoof is also given some additional helps. First, when there is a vulnerability to difficult use, hard terrain, or potential destruction, the horse is also equipped with special armor called a horse shoe. This exterior metal framing allows the horse to withstand tremendous difficulty without destruction. Similarly, Ephesians 6 tells us that our own armor gives us the ability to succeed in all things. Though the horse's hoof has a horny and hardened exterior, it is designed to have a soft interior. If for some reason that soft interior has become hardened, or the exterior shows the signs of brittleness or deterioration, the horse will not perform under stress. Such things as arthritis restrict bone movement. Side Bone and Ring Bone turn the lateral cartilages into hardened, inflexible bone, thus restricting the movement of the heel and the pulsating of the blood supply. On occasion, when a farrier (someone who shoes horses) accidentally misdrives a nail or the horse steps on a sharp object, an abscess results. An abscess is the result of any exterior "fiery dart" that somehow bypasses the exterior shield, thus allowing the interior to become oversensitive- producing lameness, soreness, and irritability. As this is the case in the hoof, every wound must be carefully examined, opened to the light, drained and treated, allowing the horse to re-grow new tissue and become useful again.

I am sure that you can join with me as Scripture comes flooding into the mind. I Peter 3:8, "Let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind hearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead. For you are called for this purpose that you might inherit a blessing." For every stride that the horse takes, he turns potentially damaging impact into power, energy, and good works. Matthew 18:35 reminds us that if we do not forgive others from the heart, we will not be forgiven. Forgiveness has little to do with changing our exterior world, but learning to process things that we view as negative on the inside. Ephesians 4:30-32 reminds us that we are not to "grieve" the Holy Spirit of God, by whom we are sealed for the day of redemption, but let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from us along with all malice. We are to be kind one to another, tender-hearted and forgiving each other just as God in Christ has forgiven us. The health of the hoof defines the entire usefulness of the horse just as the health of the Christian's heart defines its own serviceability. If the horse is resistant to the natural design in processing normal concussion, he will be lame, disqualified and un-useful. Therefore, as Hebrews 12:12-13 tells us, we are to strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble and make straight paths for our feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. We are to "pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." We are to see to it that "no one comes short of

the grace of God that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble and by it many be defiled.” Surely, together we can see that with no heart we have no message, and without a healthy hoof, we have no horse. -Lew Sterrett