

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO GET YOU WORKING FOR THE LORD?

INTRO

I turned down 3 promotions during my military career. The first was from E4 (Specialist) to E5 (Buck Sergeant). My rationale was simple—I did not feel I knew my military job well enough to be in a supervisory position. Not sure how often this happens in the civilian world, but IMO a number of people in the military are promoted too soon. The second promotion that I postponed was from E5 to E6 and involved not only a promotion, but a *move*. I opted not to take the position when first offered it because there was a situation going on in our church that I felt God would have me stay to help resolve. The third promotion I said “no” to was from E7 to E8—and one I never got a second chance to say “yes” to. The promotion meant that instead of being a Recruiter, I would be a boss over recruiters. My reason for saying “no” this time was a little more complicated.

First off, recruiting is not an easy job. A recruiter is paid to enlist people into the National Guard, but in reality, you can't make anyone join. The difficulty was **not** finding people who wanted to join; the difficulty was in finding **qualified** people who wanted to join. You had to be a certain age...and ht/wt...and have a certain level of education...and not have been in trouble with the law...and be able to pass an aptitude test...and not be doing drugs...and pass a rather stringent medical examination.

Second, once you actually find a qualified person who wants to join, there is a real possibility that someone who is close to them does **not** want them to join. Mom, Dad, boyfriend or girlfriend, Grandma or Grandpa, school friends or school teachers can all have an influence on whether or not that young person joins the military.

The third reason—and the main reason I said “no”—was this: to be successful as a boss of recruiters means that I would have to get into the heads and hearts of 8 or so recruiters under me to find out what made **them** tick. I knew what made **me** tick; I knew what motivated **me** to keep working hard even though the job was very difficult and discouraging at times. Finding out what motivated others, though, was not so easy.

--Some would need encouragement while others needed threats.

--Some needed to be left alone while others needed extra training.

--Some would work to win trips; others wouldn't work hard until you threatened to take away their pay

In Hebrews 6, we have a very similar situation—a leader trying to motivate people to work in a very difficult situation. The “work” was taking a stand for God—of letting their light shine before men—that people would see their good works and glorify their Father in heaven. The difficulty was that it was a time of intense persecution and to stand up for God was like painting a target on your back and inviting more persecution.

Text: Hebrews 6:7-12

There are five warning passages in the book of Hebrews; the verses we are looking at tie in with the third one (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 6:4-12; 10:26-39; 12:25-29). Hebrews 6:4-6 are some of the most controversial verses in all the Bible and all I'm going to say about them at this time is this: they are a warning not to depart from living for God. It's like the recruiting boss telling them they are going to lose pay...lose time off...and maybe lose their job! Realizing the warnings may discourage those who are already working hard, the author—and ultimately God—now encourages those who are serving God to keep at it—and for those who aren't busy serving to start.

These 4 verses are broken neatly into two parts with verses 9-10 being one point, and 11-12 forming the 2nd.

1. *The Encouragement to get working for the Lord* (vss 9-10)

How did the author encourage them? He reminded them of 3 things.

A. His relation to them (v 9): “But, beloved...”

--The one and only time this word is used in the book of Hebrews is right here. The meaning is more than just “brethren/fellow believers;” it carries the idea of “dear friends”

--Isn't it a blessing to have friends and hear from friends?

--Although the recipients may have been somewhat hurt by the strong warning in the previous verses, the author assures them of his love for them by using this term

--How do you take it when a friend challenges you about something in your walk with God? Do you get angry...and defensive—or do you consider what they say because you know they love you?

--Being confrontational is not my strong point; I do not walk around rubbing my hands together looking for reasons to confront people. If I do confront you, however, please know this—it is because I love you and want to see God bless your life.

Proverbs 27:5-6 “Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

--Do you have that kind of a “dear friend?” Are YOU that kind of a friend?

Not only does he remind them of his relation to them, he also points out

B. His observation of them (vss 9-10)

After warning believers not to live like unbelievers in verses 1-8, the author states that ‘you, dear friends, are different. We are persuaded of better things of you because we observe in you things that accompany—correspond with—salvation. We see your faith bearing fruit; we see it impacting your life.’

--Isn't it a blessing to have someone tell you—provided it is the truth, of course—that they have seen spiritual growth in your life? It ought not to be a source of pride, but it is most certainly a reason to be encouraged. What is it that was observed?

--The writer here is very specific in verse 10: “your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

--The “saints,” of course, are fellow believers that are still alive—not a departed believer—or possibly even an unbeliever—who was granted “sainthood.” The author observed that they “ministered” (past tense) and “do minister” (currently). It is something they had done before and were still doing.

--But what does it mean to “minister” to someone? The word “minister” comes from the Greek word “dee-ak-on-eh-o” and if you think you hear the word “deacon” in it, you are correct. It means:

--to be a servant, attendant; to serve or wait upon. It is used of those who:

--wait at a table and offer food and drink to the guests,

--of women preparing food,

--to relieve one's needs by supplying food and necessities of life

--to take care of the poor and sick

--of deacons in a church

Paul gives a description of widows who minister to the needs of others in **I Timothy 5:9-10**:

“Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man. Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.”

How did the author encourage them to work for the Lord? First, by reminding them of his special relationship with them; secondly by telling them that he had observed what they had done in the past and were still doing.

He also reminded them of...

C. God's recognition of their works (v 10) “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love...”

i. God does not forget what they had done

The author reminds them that God does not...and cannot...and will not...forget their work and labour of love.

Isn't it a blessing to know that God is not unrighteous—unjust or unfair—so as to forget what you do for Him?

--Do **other people** always know what you do for the Lord or for others? They don't, do they?

Oftentimes we don't realize or think about the work that goes on behind the scenes each week here at our church. Although we might forget their work and labour of love—God doesn't!

Not only that, but I think there are times that we do something for someone that was a real blessing to them and we **don't even know that it was**—but God knows!

--I think there are other times where we have **forgotten** what we've done for someone—but God doesn't! "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love"

In the way of a reminder, we work because we are saved—not to get saved! But we should be working! "We are His—God's—workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10).

ii. What we do for others, we do for the Lord

Notice again verse 10 "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which you have shewed **toward His name...**"

Since "name" is often used to denote the person himself, "toward His name" is best understood as toward God Himself. Stated another way, God does not forget the love that you have shown **Him** by your love and service to others. Is not that what Jesus taught in Matthew 25:40? Notice on your sheet:

Matthew 25:40 "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

I wonder if we think about that often enough? Jesus teaches us in Matthew 25:34-45 that when we feed the hungry...and give a drink to the thirsty...and give clothes to those that don't have any...and visit those that are in prison, we are doing it unto Him!

Matthew 10:42 "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold *water* only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

This verse reminds us that we are rewarded for the smallest of tasks that are done for the Lord!

First the encouragement to get working for the Lord. Second, notice the

2. **The Exhortation to get working for the Lord** (vss 11-12)

A. To all—not just some (v 11) "And we desire that **every one of you** do shew the same diligence"

Follow the thought progression here. In verses 1-8 there is a warning against those who aren't living for the Lord. In verses 9 and 10, the author says we see evidence in your life that you love God and are living for God by how you treat fellow believers. And then verse 11—"And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence..."

--We don't want just **some** of you busy—all of you need to be

--"Shew the same diligence" as who? Those that are already doing it!

"To the full assurance of hope unto the end" is a bit difficult to explain, but I don't want to conveniently ignore it either. We know it does not mean 'show your love for God by serving others so you can be assured of heaven.' I think the New American Standard captures it well:

"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence **so as to realize** the full assurance of hope until the end."

In other words, you will realize—experience—the full assurance of hope—the assurance of heaven—when you are diligently doing what God wants you to do. Conversely, do not doubts and fears creep in when we are NOT doing what we are supposed to be doing?

B. To be whole-hearted—not half-hearted (v 11a, 12)

“And we desire that everyone of you shew the same diligence”—the same strenuous endeavor, the same zeal “And that ye be not slothful” (v 12). “Slothful” comes from the Greek word “*no-thros*” and means “slow, sluggish, dull, and lazy.” It is noteworthy that the word translated “dull” in Hebrews 5:11 also comes from the Greek word “*no-thros*.” In 5:11 they are warned not to be lazy in their **thinking**; in 6:12 they are exhorted not to be lazy in their **actions**.

Question for you—can a hard-working person be lazy? Before you answer, I’m going to tell you that it is a trick question. Yes; a hard-working person can be hard-working... **at work**—but lazy when it comes to serving God. In fact, I know people that use the difficulty of their jobs and how hard they work to “give themselves a pass” as to why they are lazy when it comes to serving God. They haven’t said that to me, of course, but their life is a demonstration of it.

Not only that, but I have at times used that excuse myself! I’ve had a long, hard day and I’m just too tired to read my Bible...or pray...or have devotions with my wife...

Here’s another question for you—if the effort that you put into serving the Lord was the **same** effort that you put forth for your employer, would you still have a job? Don’t be slothful; don’t be lazy. Show diligence—earnestness and eagerness and devotion to the task of serving the Lord.

The exhortation was to all—not just some; and to whole-heartedness—not half-heartedness—to get busy showing their love for God and persevering for God. Lastly, notice the exhortation is

C. To imitate those who are doing it—not those who are not! (v 12)

“That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

There are those that we can look to for an example—that we can and should imitate—and there are those we should not. Who should we imitate; who should we follow? We should follow those who through “faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Of faith, David Allen writes: “Faith embraces the unseen as though it were visible and the future as though it were present.” Think of the **faith** of Abraham—mentioned in verse 13—especially when it came to being willing to offer up his son Isaac. He had waited 25 years for this son from whom he would become “the father of many nations,” and yet God asked him to offer him up as a sacrifice! Think of the **patience**—best understood as steadfast endurance—that Abraham and others endured as they waited for God to fulfill His promises in their lives.

In Hebrews 11 we have a list of both men and women that are pointed to as examples of faith.

Romans 15:4 “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

That which was written aforetime—the Old Testament—was written for our learning. These examples of faith demonstrate to us and encourage us that it is worth living for God regardless of the obstacles!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS:

1. Are you living for God? If you are, God's message to you is to "keep on keeping on." Don't quit because of lack of recognition—God knows what you have done and are doing. And don't quit because the promises haven't been fulfilled yet. They will be, but you need to have faith and steadfast endurance.
2. If you aren't living for God, what are you waiting for? God desires that "every one of you do shew the same diligence." Don't be a spectator—be a participant! Don't be lazy—get busy!
3. Lastly, are you saved? The writer told his dear friends that although he had given a stern warning, he saw things in their lives that pointed to their salvation. You can't have things that accompany salvation if you don't have salvation!

We work because we are saved—not to get saved. If you are attempting to work your way to heaven, you are essentially telling God that God's way for us to be saved—by grace through faith and not of works—is **wrong**. Do you really think you are in a position to tell God He is wrong?