

“Engaging in the Work of the Lord”

Everyone wants to know that what they do counts for something. Significance is often more important than financial compensation or reward. We want to know that our work is not only appreciated but important. We want to know that all our labor counted for something; that it wasn't all for nothing. Every follower of Jesus Christ has a significant part to play in His grand plan. God did not call everyone to greatness but to faithfulness. He does not measure success by earthly standards. Effectiveness is not always measured by effectiveness or productivity.

John the Baptist enjoyed only a few productive years before it all vanished and he was executed in obscurity. Elijah confronted the evil King Ahab and then disappeared into isolation and obscurity. Jesus attracted followers by the hundreds of thousands and ended up with a handful. John faithfully followed Jesus and proclaimed Him among men into his 90's and died in exile on a tiny desolate 13 square mile island in the Aegean Sea.

Hebrews 11 lists those who...

were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect. Hebrews 11:35-40

If your motive for doing what you do is greatness and notoriety, you will be in for a monumental disappointment.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian followers of Jesus to encourage them in the face of persecution and struggle and disappointment. They all expected to experience the greatness of the return of Christ in their lifetime. The reality is that more and more of their comrades were dying off and the glory of the coming kingdom seemed more and more unlikely. Paul reminded them of the heart of the message they embraced and proclaimed.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 1 Corinthians 15:3-6
He proclaimed the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He also assured them of the practical implications of following a RISEN savior and the promise of His return.

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and

this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

In light of the promise of this monumental transformation, Paul concluded his letter with an admonition. In light of our ultimate destiny, continue to remain steadfast in your faith in Christ and passionate in your ministry for Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:58

This will be the foundational verse of our contemplation today concerning faithful ministry for Christ.

Persistently trust Christ and passionately serve Christ because it matters.

First, I want to milk this passage for all the truth it has to deliver.

Second, I want to expand our understanding from other similar references.

Finally, I want to reflect on some practical implications for us today.

The use of “therefore” of course links the admonition with all that had previously been written concerning the resurrection of Christ and His promised return to instantaneously transform His followers. It is possible to also connect the last verse with the whole letter. In light of all I have previously taught you, persistently trust Christ and passionately serve Christ because it truly matters. In light of our future state, Paul urges the Corinthian followers of Jesus to currently maintain your trust. He used two present imperatives (commands) calling for a continual adherence to Christ.

Be continually “steadfast”

Be solidly based or well-seated, firm, morally fixed, firm in purpose or mind, not given to fluctuation. Be single minded, laser focused. This seems to apply to the tendency to self-doubt; double mindedness. Maintain your firm trust.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23

'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Revelation 3:11

God expects us to hold firm but he also establishes those who trust Him.

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. Colossians 2:6-7

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. 1 Peter 5:10

Be continually “immovable”

This is the word movable or to move away with a negative prefix giving an opposite meaning.

To **not** be movable or **not** moved away.

This focuses on not letting anyone else move you away from your faith. Don't let anyone deter you from your belief in the resurrection. Don't let anyone shake your trust in the risen Christ. Don't let anyone move you from your spiritual moorings.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. Colossians 2:8

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. 2 Peter 3:16-18

Our immovability is not completely dependent on us but God promises to protect us. Jesus prayed for our protection.

But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 2 Thessalonians 3:3

You are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:5

The resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of our faith. Paul was clear that if there is no resurrection, then God did not raise Jesus from the dead. If Christ wasn't raised, neither will we be raised and are fully liable for our own sins.

Those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. 1 Corinthians 15:18-19

Without the resurrection of Christ, our religion is no different than any other. Because Jesus rose from the dead, Christianity rises above every other. Paul not only calls us to persistently trust the risen Christ but passionately serve Him. Paul clearly called for a laser focus on persistently trusting and passionately serving Jesus. He used a present tense participle (ing word) indicating continuous action and then included the word "always."

The word "always" occurs at the end of the sentence for emphasis. "Continually excel in the work of the Lord ALWAYS".

The word abound means to exceed, go beyond the expected measure, surpass, go further. In order to grasp the full impact of this admonition to our own life, we need to understand what "the work of the Lord" means. The term is a common term related to any activity or labor or task. Paul refers here to work related to the Lord; work on His behalf. God calls and gifts every follower to carry out His purposes on this earth in this time. No one is saved to sit, soak and sour. Everyone has a purpose, a task, a purpose, a job to do on behalf of the kingdom.

Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to persistently trust and passionately serve Christ.

Paul included a motivation for persistently trusting and passionately serving Christ.

knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

Paul used a perfect tense action for the word “knowing” indicating the gaining of information at some point in time that continues to affect how we function. In this case, it is the knowledge that whatever labor or toil we do for the Lord is not useless. Our work for the kingdom has everlasting value.

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. Colossians 3:23-24

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. 2 Thessalonians 3:13

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. Galatians 6:9-10

How much of our time and resources have any connection to kingdom work?

Listen to Paul’s passion.

We proclaim Christ, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. Colossians 1:28-29

Paul shared the passion of Epaphroditus.

because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. Philippians 2:30

To be clear, our work for the Lord is NEVER the cause of our salvation or favor.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10

We are not saved **by** our works but **for** good works.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful. Titus 3:14

Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. Hebrews 10:24-25

You have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. Revelation 2:3-5

These followers had the persistent trust but lacked the passionate service. Are you more engaged in kingdom works or less than when you first became a Christian? We live in a self-focused culture. Samuel ministered to the Lord

Then Elkanah went to his home at Ramah. But the boy ministered to the LORD before Eli the priest. 1 Samuel 2:11

Jesus told the disciples that greater works than mine will you do.

Jesus said, "As the Father sent me, I send you."

Practical implications

Look at Jesus to get an idea of what work we are called to do. Love and minister to people at their need. Reflect the character of the Father through the way you live. Speak the truth in love. Urge people to be reconciled to God. Give a cup of water in His name. Feed the hungry in His name.

The focus of many is to build a retirement so they can spend their rest of their lives in leisure. The Biblical focus is to persistently trust Christ and passionately serve Christ always because it counts. The Biblical model is that every believer is gifted, equipped and called to engage in service to the Lord at some level. There is really no biblical concept of retirement in the sense of no longer engaged in ministry. God calls people to always serve the Lord with their talents, life skills, knowhow, and life opportunities.

The question is how much of our work or activity could be classified as "the work of the Lord."

That can best be answered by evaluating the why rather than the what of our activity. Anything done in His name, for His sake could be considered the "work of the Lord."

The three measures taught here have to do with type, level and longevity.

- **Engage in the WORK OF THE LORD. (Not our work)**
- **EXCEL in the work of the Lord. (Not mediocre)**
- **Excel in the work of the Lord ALWAYS. (Not just for a season)**

Some of you have heard of the Pareto principle or more commonly known as the 80/20 rule. Initially it was observed in the area of economics where 80% of the wealth is controlled by 20% of the people.

It seems to also apply to many other factors as well.

20% of the people do 80% of the work.

80% of the budget comes from 20% of the people.

80% of the food will be eaten by 20% of the people while 80% of the food will be brought by 20% of the people.

20% of any book will contain 80% of the content.

20% of the employees are responsible for 80% of the output

20% of the customers supply 80% of the revenue.

80% of your time will be expended on 20% of the people in your life.

20% of your activities result in 80% of your life satisfaction.

80% of your heartache stem from only 20% of the issues in your life.

Why do I bring up the 80/20 principle? It applies equally to church life. Generally only 20% of the members of any given congregation carry out 80% of the ministry. No matter how large the congregation, there is usually on 20% behind the scenes making it work.

In fact, many people are drawn to a large congregation where their inactivity is less conspicuous. 20% of the congregation supports 80% of the budget. Of the 20%, the majority are over 50 years old.

I believe the Biblical teaching and God's expectation is 100% participation. God gifts EVERY believer to function somewhere in the community of Christ in some way. True growth comes when every gifted believer does their part.

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Ephesians 4:15-16

Everyone has a different gift and calling -- Diversity

Everyone serves the same Lord – Unity

Everyone is dependent on the proper working of the others in the community – Mutuality

If every member took this admonition seriously...

Work for the Lord.

Work for the Lord passionately

Work for the Lord always

Every aspect of ministry would be covered by someone.

People ministries - Administration ministry - Teaching ministry - Worship ministry - Facility and grounds maintenance - Financial support - Prayer support

The prophet strongly admonished the Jewish people for neglecting the “work of the Lord” in favor of their own “work.” None of us will always have the physical capabilities to do the things we did in the early years. Everyone can do SOMETHING.

We are in a culture that attends church on Sunday with little interaction any other time. We need to cultivate a new culture that serves the church as a lifestyle. We need a value that expects full participation in church community life. The question should not be where do you attend but where do you serve. Jesus shared a serious parable about people who had been provided with the resources to invest in His important kingdom work during His absence.

Most invested their resources to gain more and were proportionally rewarded.

One refused to invest anything but keep it hidden.

The one who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.' But

his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 25:24-30

I am grateful for the 20 or more percent that faithfully invests their resources in the work of the Lord here at Chico and beyond. But I am longing for an even greater percent because that is the Biblical standard that defies the world's practice.

What percentage of your daily activity could you honestly say relates to the work of the Lord?
What is God asking you to do about it today?