

FLYING LEVEL? or OUT OF CONTROL?

INTRODUCTION

Trust and Obey

"Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,
But our toil He doth richly repay;
Not a grief nor a loss, not a frown nor a cross,
But is blest if we trust and obey."

"But we never can prove the delights of His love
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favor He shows and the joy He bestows
Are for them who will trust and obey."

Trust and Obey, by John Sammis

Dependence and Discipline

1 Timothy 4:7

"GOD'S PART IS TO GIFT US WITH FAITH AND THEN STRENGTHEN US TO WORK; AND THEN, TO GIFT US TO TRUST FOR HIS RESULTS FROM OUR WORK!"

1. Work or Pray?

Psalms 127:1

Bridges: "The builders can't simply put away their tools and go fishing, and expect God to build the house!"

Nehemiah 4:8-9

Some Christians today would immediately start looking for weapons, and arm to the teeth, building razor wire, electrified fences around the work and prepare to the hilt for the task of guarding. Still other Christians would insist the only thing to do is to organize 'round the clock prayer chains, making sure that every moment was taken up in prayer. And worst of all, the one group would be criticizing the other

When we are facing a personal crisis in our own spiritual development what do we turn to FIRST?--Dependence or Discipline?

1 Corinthians 15:10

John Piper's Christmas Poems:

"It is sheer hard work. The reading of them on Sunday morning is often a spiritually moving moment (as least for me), but the making of the poems is toil and cannot be elevated to a mystical moment of revelation. I hit brick walls again and again in writing, unable to make the rhyme work so that it is not hackneyed or unnatural. Or I can't find a way to say a complex thought in understandable language for people who must get it on the first hearing. And then there is the sheer exhaustion factor: how to keep awake and thinking and creating at 2 A.M. two nights in a row. Not always, but sometimes. So at those moments I cry out, 'O Lord, I need a breakthrough. Please help me!'

And here is what I have learned. At that moment, after that prayer, I should not and must not sit there with an empty mind waiting for something to pop into an idling mind. It does not happen. God simply does not work that way. Neither in writing, nor in living. I have proved it for decades now, and with almost twenty years of Advent poems in particular. Nor is there biblical warrant to think it will happen. The biblical rule is 'I worked harder than any of them.'

Instead of leaving the mind idle, I pray, and then I bend every fiber of effort in my mind and body to think and create. And the breakthroughs come. They do not feel miraculous. They feel agonizingly natural. But they come. And because I asked God for them, I give Him thanks. 'It was not I, but the grace of God which was with me.'

Each poem takes fifteen to eighteen hours to write. I have tried repeatedly to shorten the time.

But this appears to be an irreducible minimum. God has appointed, I believe, that good things be hard work. I see this in Philippians 2:12-13 ('Work out your salvation with fear and trembling') and 1 Corinthians 15:10 ('I labored even more than all of them') and 2 Timothy 2:15 ('Be diligent...a workman who does not need to be ashamed') and many other places. Work is appointed for us. Prayer is not a replacement for work. It is the atmosphere of work. It is what gives to work its supernatural effectiveness.

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Life, well lived, is like writing a poem. And therefore it is hard, very hard. A sloppy prose life or an unintelligible, free verse life would not be as hard. And the effect would not be as great. *** Beauty and truth and compelling depth come by painstaking thinking and trial and praying and self-correcting. So, Lord, I go back to my work now and pray that you will write a poem in all the messages and ministries of my life. 'Unless the Lord builds the house [or poem or sermon-or life], those who build it labor in vain' (Psalm 127:1, RSV). 'I worked harder than any of them, nevertheless, it was not I but the grace of God which was with me.'

Piper, *A Godward Life*, Book Two, pp. 302-04.

2. Paul's Testimony

Philippians 4:13

One of the most misused passages of Scripture in modern Christianity, I believe, is Philippians 4:13. How is that Scripture misused?

Philippians 4:11-13

Paul had "learned" to be content--trusting in the strength of the Lord at the same time

Colossians 1:28-29--"I toil, struggling...."

"struggling" in *Colossians 1:28-29* is from the Greek word "**agonizomai**" from which we get our English word "agonize"

"Shall We Goof Off That Grace May Abound?"

"[V]iewing faith as a gift is easily perverted into passivity. The danger is that we will become passive and say, 'Well, if I am to do my ministry [or live my life] by faith, and faith is a work of God's grace, then there is nothing for me to do. I will just stay at home and watch TV.' Now that is an unbiblical and irrational response to the teaching of Romans 12:3.

We know it is unbiblical because right there in the text the whole point of Romans 12:6-8 is to exhort the Christians in just the opposite way; namely, to do something. *** In other words, *exercise* your gift. Don't let it lie dormant. Take hold of it by faith and use it.

Resist passivity and look to God and say: 'Lord, I know that you have given me a gift for some kind of ministry. I am tired, and I am anxious that I will not do a good job. But, Lord, I trust *You*, not me and not my gift. I trust Your enabling grace. In fact, I trust You even to help me trust You because You said that faith is Your gift. And I go to my ministry (say my small group leadership [or say my attempt to witness or live like Christ in my workplace or my home]) tonight in the strength that *You* supply so that in everything you might get the glory. *** The gift of faith doesn't replace service; it trusts in power to do service.

Listen again to Paul from *Colossians 1:28-29*.... Paul labors. Paul strives. But it is the mighty power of Christ that works in him, enabling him.

The point is this: God does not will *instead* of our willing; He wills in and *through* our willing. God does not work instead of our working, but through our working. God does not energize instead of our having energy; He energizes our energy. Therefore it is unbiblical and irrational to say that because the grace of God produces an active trust in God, we don't need to exert an active trust in God."

Piper, *A Godward Life*, Book Two, pp. 330-31

3. What About The Passive Approach?

"Let Go and Let God" is good advice if we have been resisting God's will. But it is not good advice if we know God's will and doing God's will requires certain activity on our part.

Bridges' Personal Example:

"Did Jesus then love him through me? No, He enabled *me* to love the man. We are not passive in the pursuit of holiness. We are the ones who love. We are the ones who clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (Colossians 3:12). But we do this in utter dependence on Him who gives us strength."

Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, p. 132

John Owen:

"Let us consider what regard we ought to have to our own duty and to the grace of God. Some would separate these things as inconsistent. If holiness be our duty, they would say, there is no room for grace; and if it be the result of grace there is no place for duty. But our duty and God's grace are nowhere opposed in the matter of sanctification; for the one absolutely supposes the other. We cannot perform our duty without the grace of God; nor does God give His grace for any other purpose than that we may perform our duty."

Bridges, quoting John Owen, *The Discipline of Grace*, p. 133

"We must not ignore or neglect our responsibility in the name of dependence or faith----in reality that would be a neglect of God-dependence and a neglect of faith against the clear witness of Scripture."

"Man's part is to trust *and* work. God's part is to *enable* the man or woman to do the work...or Our part is to work, but to do so in reliance upon God to enable us to work."

Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, p. 133

4. The Self-Discipline Approach

"The ability to alter certain behaviors by self-discipline is part of God's common grace towards mankind."

<u>What the Farmer Can and Must Do</u> (common grace)	<u>What Only God Can Do</u> (God's grace)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plowing• Planting• Weeding• Fertilizing• Cultivating the soil• Harvesting on time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Control the rainfall• Cause the plants to grow• Keep the farmer healthy• Prevent the lightning• Direct the locusts• Control the heat

How much more should we as believers understand that we must rely on God's grace for everything, even the strength to do what we can and must do?

"The actual aid and internal operation of the Spirit of God is necessary to produce every holy act of our minds, wills, and emotions in every duty whatsoever. Notwithstanding the power or ability that believers have received by the principle of new life implanted at salvation, they still stand in need of the divine enablement of the Holy Spirit in every single act or duty toward God."

Bridges, quoting John Owen, *The Discipline of Grace*, p. 136

The sin of self-sufficiency--rooted in pride.

Bridges:

"In theory we believe them [the words of Jesus in John 15:5-"apart from me you can do nothing"], but in practice we tend to live as if we can do some things."

Is it possible that God is allowing you and me to fall to temptation because He knows we are not relying on Him?

"Work to maintain a sense of your entire dependence upon the Lord's good will and pleasure for the continuance of your richest enjoyments. Never try to live on the old manna, nor seek to find help in Egypt. All must come for Jesus, or you are undone forever. Old anointings will not suffice to impart unction to your spirit; your head must have fresh oil poured upon it from the golden horn of the sanctuary, or it will cease from its glory. Today you may be upon the summit of the mountain of God, but He who has put you there must keep you there, or you will sink far more speedily than you dream. Your mountain only stands firm when He settles it in its place; if He were to hide His face, you would soon be troubled...He can withdraw the joy of your heart, the light of your eyes, and the strength of your life; in His hand your comforts lie, and at His will they can depart from you. Our Lord is determined that we shall feel and recognize this hourly dependence, for He alone permits us to pray for 'daily bread,' and alone promises that 'your strength will equal your days.' Isn't it best for us that it should be so, that we may often go to His throne, and constantly be reminded of His love?"

Spurgeon, Morning and Evening, July 15m

5. How Do We Achieve Dependent Discipline? --Discipline of Prayer

"We will grow in Dependent Discipline as we practice the discipline of prayer."

NOT TO ACHIEVE A GOAL, BUT TO KNOW HIM!

AS A TANGIBLE EXPRESSION OF OUR DEPENDENCE!

Ephesians 6:18

Ephesians 6:10

Psalm 119

Two Kinds Of Prayer-The Way To Dependent Discipline:

1. Planned, Protracted and Persevering Prayer;
2. Short, Unplanned and Spontaneous Prayer.

Romans 8:13

Make a Plan! Make a Plan!! Make a Plan!!!

"On looking back upon the character of our prayers, if we do it honestly, we shall be filled with wonder that God has ever answered them.... Remember, Christian, how co/dyour prayers have been.... Yet, wonderful to say, God has heard these cold prayers of yours, and not only heard, but answered them. Reflect also, how *infrequent* your prayers have been, unless you have been in trouble, and *then you* have gone often to the mercy seat: but when deliverance has come, where has your constant supplication been? Yet in spite of the fact that you have stopped praying as you once did, God has not ceased to bless. When you have neglected the mercy seat, God has not deserted it, but the bright light of the Shekinah has always been visible between the wings of the cherubim. Oh! It is marvelous that the Lord should regard those intermittent spasms of insistent requests which come and go with our necessities. What a God is He thus to hear the prayers of those who come to Him when they have pressing wants, but neglect Him when they have received a mercy; who approach Him when they are forced to come, but who almost forget to address Him when mercies are plentiful and sorrows are few. Let His gracious kindness in hearing such prayers touch our hearts, so that we may henceforth be found to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and petitions."

Spurgeon, Morning and Evening, July 16m