

Week 8: Diligence

"He that would have the fruit must climb the tree." (Thomas Fuller)

A farmer who doesn't work doesn't eat.

Crops don't raise themselves.

The farmer who wants produce at harvest must work the whole season.

He may try to buck the system. He may try to cheat the system. He may try to beat the system. Ultimately, though, he cannot. He cannot break the natural laws that God established; he can only break himself against those laws.

"Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." (2 Corinthians 9:6, NASB)

Diligence

Diligence is a defining character trait of the godly individual.

Scripture bears this out in multiple passages:

- "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for me *with all your heart*." (Jeremiah 29:13, NASB)
- "...He is a rewarder of those who *diligently* seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6, NKJV)
- "The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'" (Matthew 25:20-21, NASB)
- "All hard work brings a profit..." (Proverbs 14:23, NIV)

Given God's preference for diligence, He shows little sympathy for the person who chooses laziness:

"...if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either." (2 Thessalonians 3:10, NASB)

Characteristics of True Diligence

True diligence can be recognized by several characteristics:

It results from internal motivation. The diligent person needs no goading or prodding to start what needs to be started. Neither does he need constant supervision nor chaperoning to ensure that he finishes what needs to be finished.

“Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise, which, *having no chief, officer or ruler*, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest.” (Proverbs 6:6-8, NASB)

It begins with the end in mind. The diligent person does not expend effort haphazardly. Instead, he organizes, plans, and maps out his work in such a way that he will achieve his desired results. He realizes that particular results require particular efforts.

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The winter stockpile only materializes if the ant plans ahead and starts collecting in the summer and fall. No forethought, no food in the winter.

It is productive, not simply busy. The diligent person recognizes that not all busyness is business. He thus chooses only to engage in productive effort.

“For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, *doing no work at all*, but acting like *busybodies*.” (2 Thessalonians 3:11, NASB)

It's possible to be busy without accomplishing anything productive. Not all effort is created equal. Wheels can spin both in the sand and on the road, but only one of those results in forward progress.

It is ultimately focused on more than self-satisfaction. Diligence brings great reward to the one exerting the effort:

- “...the hand of the diligent makes rich.” (Proverbs 10:4, NASB)
- “...the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.” (Proverbs 13:4, NKJV)
- “He who tills his land will have plenty of food...” (Proverbs 28:19, NASB)
- “In all labor there is profit...” (Proverbs 14:23, NASB)

Questions For Thought and Discussion

1. If diligence is a learned trait, what practical steps can we take to ingrain it into our character? How do we develop a strong, solid work ethic?
2. Scripture obviously commends diligence in spiritual/eternal matters (Heb. 11:6), but does it promote diligence in temporal matters? In other words, as long as we are diligent in our seeking of God, does it really matter how diligent we are in the affairs of this life?
3. This lesson lists 4 defining features of true diligence. What other characteristics could you add to that list?
4. When is rest/relaxation appropriate? How much is appropriate? How do you make these decisions? What factors should you consider as you make these decisions?
5. Is it possible to be too diligent? Is there ever a time when working/being diligent is not appropriate?

In the end, though, diligence sees a higher purpose:

“He who steals must steal no longer; but rather *he must labor*, performing with his own hands what is good, *so that he will have something to share with one who has need.*” (Ephesians 4:28, NASB)

The Underlying Motivation

Underneath it all, the motivation that ought to drive us to be people of diligence is that we work for our Creator.

“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, NASB)