

WHY ARE THE LABORERS FEW?

Jesus said, *“The harvest is plentiful, but the Laborers are few”* in Matthew 9:37. Have I ever pondered the question, *“Why are the Laborers few?”*

What are some obvious hurdles & hindrances to Laboring?

- Intimidation – Fear that I’m not qualified
- Distractions – What Jesus called “the desire for other things”
- Busyness – Simply not managing my capacities well
- Immaturity – Still self-absorbed with the “small picture” of my own concerns

These are all legitimate & real impediments to laboring... & we could add to the list. However, there may be larger “spiritual root issues” at the level of my heart, that “drive” or determine my susceptibility to being sidetracked by challenges like the ones mentioned above. At least some of those “root issues” can be found hidden in the “intro” or “pre-amble” to one of Paul’s Epistles...

“We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess. 1:3)

Note the familiar trio of Faith, Hope & Love. However, unlike in their more famously quoted context (1 Corinthians 13:13), this time, each of them have a “handle” with them... or an “effect” to their “cause.” According to this passage...

- Faith “produces” Work
- Love “prompts” Labor
- Hope “inspires” Endurance

But aren’t “work” & “labor” synonyms? Not in the original language, anyway. The Holy Spirit is not in charge of “The Department of Redundancy Department.” He does not waste words or put “fluff” in the Scriptures. Note the meanings of these words in the Greek...

- Work = “Ergon” (ἔργον) – To toil to the point of affecting things
- Labor = “Kopos” (κόπος) – To toil to the point of bother, trouble, difficulty, or pain
- Hope = “Elpis” (ἐλπίς) – To anticipate or expect with certainty & pleasure
(Note how different from the way we use “hope” – Not a synonym for “wish”)

So, faith will “cause you to do something.” In other words, true faith will cause some sort of action (see James 2:17). Love (agape), on the other hand, will take us to the next level. Love will “prompt” me to work to the point of great personal sacrifice & pain. And, it is “Hope” that will cause me to *keep laboring*, over the long haul. To summarize...

Faith will make me work, Love enables me to labor to the point of great personal sacrifice, & Hope makes me able to keep on doing this, for the rest of my life.

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Now, let's revisit our initial passage of Scripture, Matthew 9:37. When Jesus said, ***"The Laborers are few"*** – which of our Greek words from 1 Thessalonians 1:3 do you suppose he was using for "laborers?" Since he says such people are "few," I would think it must be the more difficult of the two, the word "Kopos" – which is laboring to the point of sacrifice & pain. Surprisingly, it is not "Kopos" but simply "Ergon." Understanding this Greek meaning, we could paraphrase a possible version of Jesus's statement that follows through to logical conclusions from the Greek insights found in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 this way:

"There are plenty of people who would respond, but there aren't many who will do anything about it... & those that are willing to truly pay a price to help them respond, they are a rare treasure, indeed."

Perhaps you are one of those rare treasures... one who not only is willing to "do something" about the expansion of God's Kingdom on earth, but even do so to the point of significant personal sacrifice. The enemy's focus is to make sure you don't ***keep doing it***, for a lifetime. The secret here is "Hope." Since we use "hope" as a synonym for "wish" (i.e., "I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow"), perhaps we should substitute the phrase "focused on eternity" for "hope." It literally means "a confident anticipation of what is to come." This is what will keep me laboring, for the long haul... a posture of intentionally delayed gratification, more than certain that it will be "worth the wait" & then some (see Mark 10:29-30).

But, if Faith, Hope & Love are the keys to it all... where do I get them? How do they increase in my life? These are among the kinds of things we hear preachers tell us, "It's like a muscle. The more you use it, the stronger it becomes." There is much truth in this. Chosen reliance on God, in every moment of our lives, will help... a lot. But there is a curious passage in the "intro" of yet another New Testament Epistle. Colossians 1: 4-5 says...

"We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints — the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven..."

The Faith & Love we long for actually "springs out of" our HOPE. This focus on our certain reward in eternity is the key or "wellspring" of the other two transformative commodities of Faith & Love. Where, then, do we get Hope? That is a question for another paper. But if you look, you will find the answer(s) hidden carefully by your Father, in His Living Word! ☺

So, the next time we sense we are running low on "fuel" to keep paying a price for the Advance of The Gospel... we must remember that our need is far more than to "try harder" or "just keep going." We may be losing our focus on the sure & indescribably wonderful eternity that awaits us & will make it all "much more than worth it." May God richly bless you for your commitment to allow Him to make you a rare treasure... ***a Laborer.***

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