

## Set Yourself for Difficult Tasks

### I. ***“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going”***

— *Ecclesiastes 9:10*

A. The context of this verse’s quotation is essentially the author’s wisdom on getting the most out of life:

1. Speaking from the standpoint that eventually all men of every station will face death, the author encourages any who would listen to seize every opportunity to labor that they are presented with, and put every bit of effort into they can muster:
2. And while there are many who approach life in such a way, this is unfortunately not a sentiment shared by a majority of people.

**B. By and large our culture** has an aversion to difficulty:

1. Not just in the general sense that people would like avoid hard times— but in the sense that whatever task lays ahead of us, whether it be leisurely or work, our desire to see it through is directly related to how difficult it will be:
  - a) If someone invites me for home cooked meal, my willingness to go and get this tasty treat is going to depend on how far I have to drive to get it:
  - b) If the grass is relatively short, and it hasn’t rained all week, I might even look forward to cutting the grass: If it has rained on and off for the past two weeks and the grass has grown several inches high, I am noticeably less enthusiastic about getting behind the push mower:

**C. And this is certainly** not limited to our culture; Indeed there is a sense in which ever since God cursed the land in **Genesis 3** and told Adam and Eve just how difficult their lives were going to be, toiling to cultivate crops and the pains of childbirth, that man has spent much of his time trying to create ways to offset those difficulties:

1. The idea that hard work and determination are the keys to success have slowly been replaced by the mantra “Work Smarter, Not Harder”— *(a quick Google search for articles written on this topic will yield close to Two Million results)*

2. By itself there is nothing wrong with this idea; the general concept behind this phrase is finding ways to be more productive with less effort, but it has become something of a joke; words that are said in jest by one who is looking to do as little work as possible with the least effort required.
3. **Is there anything wrong with** being blessed with comforts; With living in a time where jobs and chores that in times past may have required many people and many hours, but now take one person minutes to perform?
  - a) No: There is nothing evil about any of that: But I would suggest that there is a *danger*:
  - b) As with any other aspect of our culture we should be aware of how it is affecting us as God's people:
    - (1) If we were to make a list of reactions to living in a time as we do now, what might it look like? Perhaps **Gratefulness, Thanksgiving, Embracing Responsibility, Appropriate action, Determination to avoid squandering?**
    - (2) Is that the way that you would describe our culture? Here are some terms that come to mind: **Entitlement, Expectation, Avoidance, Placing/Shifting Blame:**
      - (a) Do those sound like characteristics we should adopt as God's people?

**D. Our purpose is not** to be down and complain about the world around us; but rather to acknowledge that the advancements and comforts we have been blessed with have created in many spirit that perceives almost everything as too difficult and requiring too much effort.

1. As God's people we must rise above this!
  - a) We certainly don't want to be categorized like this from a strictly physical perspective:
  - b) But if that same spirit of culture were to work its way into a local congregation, what do you think would happen to that church?

**E. Let's take a few moments and look at some examples of godly people who were willing to tackle difficult tasks:**

## II. Abram Journeys to Canaan: (*Genesis 12:1-5*)

- A.** In Genesis chapter 11, we are given the descendants of Shem the son of Noah. It is there that we are first introduced to the family of Abram, and his father Terah:
- 1.** When we meet Abraham, he is already well into his life: He has many relatives who are listed as part of his family, and they have made a home and built a life for themselves, first in Ur, and then in the land of Haran, where he acquired possessions and more servants and members of his household.
  - 2.** It is at this point in his life, at the age of 75, that God calls on Abraham to leave all of this and make the journey to Canaan:
  - 3.** This is a familiar story; and we often dwell on many of the difficulties that arose later for Abraham's family; it is for these reasons that perhaps we sometimes forget the initial difficulty involved in his decision to obey the Lord:
- B. Abraham was called to leave home and family:** the friends and familiar faces that been a part of his life in Ur and Haran for the previous 75 years were to be left behind and replaced with strangers and a strange place: He would leave all that was familiar in order to be what the Hebrew writer calls an alien in a foreign land.
- C. Abraham was called to leave what was stable and established:** Abraham's previous home has been shown to have been quite advanced for its day. There were houses and markets, technological advances; it would have been a place of civilization: He was called out of this to go to a place "*not knowing where he was going*" to live in tents for the rest of his life.
- D. Abraham was asked to show an extraordinary amount of faith:** Abraham was asked to believe that God would take an unknown homeless man with no children, and give him an entire country to be filled with innumerable descendants that would bless the entire world for all ages to come.
- 1.** Abraham set himself for a difficult task:

## III. Paul Goes to Jerusalem: *Acts 21:7-14*

- A.** Paul was one who repeatedly put himself in difficult situations: He went in to cities where he knew he wasn't wanted: He got up after being stoned and would walk back

into the same city; He confronted enemies at every turn and was never afraid to speak out, from a lowly citizen to high rulers:

- I.** Out of all of his difficult tasks; the scene played out in **Acts 21** stands out to me:
- B.** Paul did not know everything that would happen to him Jerusalem, only that it wasn't good: **Acts 20:22-25** *And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face.*
- C.** Paul left dear brethren behind: He left treasured fellow workers in christ behind. He left the stability of various local works that he could have continued to stay on and do much good.
  - I.** But God had other plans for Paul: Eventually Paul was to be told in **Acts 23** that he would be going to Rome: but for this to happen Paul had to be willing to face difficult tasks:

#### **IV. Many Others have been called to face difficult tasks:**

- A.** Moses had to choose whether to defend his fellow Hebrew and sacrifice all that came with being a son of Pharaoh, or to deny his heritage: **(Ex 2)**
- B.** Jonathan had to decide whether he would follow the slack example of his father's poor leadership, or inspire Israel's armies by charging off with only his armor bearer to face the Philistines (**1 Sam 14**)
- C.** Hosea was called to take a wife who he knew would be unfaithful to him multiple times, and love her regardless: To continue to take her back, and raise children that were not his own— all to demonstrate how much God continued to love unfaithful Israel: **(Hosea 1)**
  - 1.** None of these men would be remembered by us as such staunch examples if they had viewed their tasks before them through the eyes of today's cultural spirit:
  - 2.** These are the type of men we should strive to be like!