

It Does Good to Do Good

Life is filled with seemingly “impossible” situations, those where it seems that nothing we can do will make any difference for good. There may be some small step that we could take in a positive direction, but the devil is quick to discourage us: “The little things you could do wouldn’t be enough to change the outcome. Why waste your effort? Wouldn’t it be easier just to give up?”

As always, of course, the devil is lying. To start with, when we stay focused and patiently do one little thing after another, we’re often able to do what the devil said couldn’t be done: change the outcome. But even if not, there happen to be plenty of other reasons for doing what’s good.

Just a few days ago I was rereading a favorite book by J. R. R. Tolkien and came across a long forgotten passage where he has one of his characters say, “There are some things that it is better to begin than to refuse, even though the end may be dark.” I was reminded of how nourishing Tolkien’s fiction was to me in my youth. The work of this Englishman is one of the great literary monuments to the truth that honor always does what it can do, and that great good comes from the “little” actions of those who, not knowing the outcome, go ahead and do whatever is right in the present moment.

Those who know their Bibles, of course, know that this truth is biblical truth. How many examples can we think of where God called upon individuals to do something that to them would have seemed a waste of effort? When Jesus asked His apostles what they had with which they could feed the multitude, Andrew said, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?” (Jn. 6:9). Before the day was done, however, Jesus had fed the five thousand and proved again that God is able to take small resources and produce astonishing results. Having read this story, how can we ever say, “Lord, what good will it do?”

The very essence of “faith” is the willingness to do whatever we know God would want us to do, whether we can see how it will “work out” or not. When Jesus instructed the apostles to launch out into the deep and let down their nets for a catch, Peter’s answer was, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net” (Lk. 5:5). Whatever misgivings he may have had, Peter did what the Lord said because it was the Lord speaking!

If we say we have faith, but we’re not willing to act when we can’t see the outcome, then it’s not God’s foresight that we trust, but our own. Faith takes God at His word and does whatever He says, disregarding the devil’s lie that “it won’t do any good.” It always does good to do good — whether we live long enough to see the good or not.

A few years ago I had to make a decision that was far more difficult than the sum total

of all the others I'd had ever made. After many agonizing, indecisive months, most of which were consumed trying to foresee the "consequences" of all the alternatives before me, it finally occurred to me that consequences can't be allowed to have the final say in matters of right and wrong. Honor simply does what one's deepest conscience determines to be right, and leaves the outcome in the hands of a wise God who can see much farther down the road than we can.

Shortsightedness (often coupled with selfishness) is a serious hindrance to our decision-making.

When we know what we should do, but we're wondering what good it'll do, we tend to define "good" in terms of very short-term benefits (often those that will accrue to us personally). But even if we knew how a decision would play out for the remainder of our days, one human life-time is but a tiny fragment of what God deals with. Shouldn't we let Him determine what "good" consequences need to be set in motion?

Solomon wisely advised his son, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). And this good counsel was offered in Ecclesiastes: "As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good" (Eccl. 11:5,6). The fact is, we don't have to know all that God knows. It's His job to run the universe, and we can trust that He'll do it perfectly. Meanwhile, there are many productive things we can do if we'll just focus on doing our best with the present moment.

When a child of the King is faced with any "hopeless" situation, giving up should never be an option. It is far nobler to die, if need be, fighting beneath His banner than to "save" ourselves by succumbing to evil. May God give us not only the courage to follow our conscience, but the wisdom to trust His foresight. The consequences of right conduct won't be fully known until eternity. In the meantime, the wise are those who remember: it always does good to do good.

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