

I Choose to Abound in Kingdom Work

1 Corinthians 15:58

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable,
always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing your toil
is not in vain in the Lord.*

Do you know any “couch potatoes?” A couch potato is defined as “an inactive person who lives a sedentary lifestyle.” We usually think of someone who plops down in the recliner while holding a bag of chips in one hand and a diet cola in the other. Physicians stress regularly (and for good reason!) the importance of physical activity and exercise for the betterment of one’s health.

Do you know any “pew potatoes?” A *pew potato* is someone who plops down weekly in a church pew (*their* pew!) while complaining often about critical matters such as—*The preacher went five minutes too long this morning! It was too hot (cold) in the building today! Sister _____ gives me a headache with her high-pitch singing! Speaking of singing, brother _____ can’t carry a tune in a bucket!* The pew potato usually arrives late, leaves early, and complains because “no one in this church is friendly.”

Pew potatoes are quite common.

Jesus was extremely blunt about those who think the totality of their involvement begins and ends with their name in a pictorial church directory. Addressing such tepid apathy at Laodicea, He said, “So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:16). Half-hearted devotion is obviously no devotion at all.

I. God Expects Extra Effort from His People.

A. When the apostle Paul ended his great dissertation on the resurrection, he challenged every believer in 1 Corinthians 15:58. “*Therefore, my beloved brethren*” (this challenge is for the Christian), “*be steadfast, immovable*” (this challenge requires loyalty and commitment), “*always abounding*” (this challenge involves extra effort), “*in the work of the Lord*” (this challenge involves an endeavor in a special cause—the Lord’s cause), “*knowing your toil will not be in vain in the Lord*” (this challenge will be rewarded). Note:

1. The Who? “*my beloved brethren*”
2. The What? “*be steadfast, immovable*”
3. The Where? “*in the work of the Lord*”
4. The Why? “*knowing that your toil is not in vain*”
5. The When? “*always abounding*”

B. God expects His children to become a part of a local assembly of believers* (Hebrews 10:23–25) and to do so with the determination of active participation. The government may issue its “minimum standard requirement” regarding nutrition, but the force of Scripture knows nothing about *minimum* spiritual devotion.

- Matthew 5:41—“If any ask you to go one mile, go with him *two*.”
- 2 Corinthians 8:3—“*Beyond* their ability, they [Macedonians], gave of their own accord.”
- Galatians 6:10—“While we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, *especially* to those who are of the household of faith.”
- 1 Peter 3:15—“*Always* being ready to make a defense...”
- 2 Peter 1:5—“Apply *all* diligence...”
- Jude 3—“Contend *earnestly* for the faith...”

*Each of the many “one another” commands of the New Testament are best fulfilled by association in a local assembly. Paul’s letters to specific local churches plus his admonition to “obey your leaders and submit to them” (Hebrews 13:17)

requires that we belong to a local church whereby we can grow, be accountable, and both give and receive encouragement. To argue in favor of being a “Christian at large” is to deny these necessary conclusions of Scripture.

- C. God calls His people to go above and beyond. He requires more than the *NORM*: Non-inspired, Ordinary, Rote, and Mundane.

II. 212°—The Extra Degree.

Water boils at 212 degrees. And when water boils it makes steam. And steam harnessed can move a train! One degree makes all the difference.

- A. It’s amazing how seemingly small things matter. As Vince Lombardi said, “Inches make a champion.” The secret between success at anything is no secret—it’s extra effort. That’s true in the business world, raising a God-fearing family, or being a part of a growing church. Success at anything is no accident.
1. It’s not effort that is usually missing, but extra effort. If you don’t believe that, ask the silver or bronze medal winners at the Olympics.
 2. Or ask Paul. In fact, you don’t have to because he spells it out in 2 Corinthians 11:23–28. His description of what he went through to work in the kingdom is jaw-dropping regardless of how many times you read it. Or ask Jesus Himself. He labored at times to the point of exhaustion (Mark 3:8–9, 20; 6:31).
- B. What keeps us from giving extra effort?
1. *Preoccupation with hobbies and sports.* We get too many irons in the fire, involve our kids in limitless activities, and spend too much time focused on extra-curricular stuff. To my question, “What’s your biggest frustration as a shepherd of God’s people?”—one elder responded, “We have too many young families who don’t make time for the Lord’s work. It’s even hard to find teachers willing to devote time to teaching Bible classes.”

2. *Lost idealism.* Once reality sets in and we learn that most will reject the gospel, it's easy to stop trying altogether. Even though the sower is not always successful, he doesn't stop planting.
3. *Prosperity.* Does the church grow more in times of adversity or prosperity? Prosperous times are much like the feeling you get after eating a big meal—you would rather nap than work.

III. Our Problem is not Information, but Motivation.

- A. The failure for most Christians and churches is not in knowing, but in doing. How easy it is to settle into the rut of status quo and decide to coast. Do you think the Lord is pleased with that?
 1. To the church at Ephesus: “Repent and do the deeds you did at first.”
 2. To the church at Sardis: “Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain which were about to die.”
 3. To the church at Laodicea: “Be zealous and repent.”
- B. When it comes to kingdom work, there is work for everyone to do. Ephesians 4:16—“according to the working of each individual part.” The physical body works only when every part works. It's the same with the local church.
 1. Each of us needs to look at our spiritual commitment and ask: Am I giving effort or am I giving my *best* effort? Am I merely mediocre in my commitment or am I on *fire* for Christ? Am I coasting, or am I a “212” Christian?
 2. It can be as simple as the decision we make to stay home on Wednesday night because we're not feeling 100% instead of pushing ourselves to come because someone needs our encouragement (and we need theirs). It can involve our dedication when it comes to giving financially—are we sacrificing or giving a token? And what about the use of our talents? Are we getting too comfortable pew-sitting or are we stepping out of our

shadow and participating and growing in ways that stretch us spiritually? Here it is for every local church:

- Elders—*extra* effort at shepherding
- Deacons—*extra* effort at serving
- Preachers—*extra* effort at teaching
- Bible class teachers—*extra* effort in the classroom
- Every Christian—*extra* effort when it comes to greeting guests, praying for one another, cleaning the building, waiting in hospital waiting rooms, taking food to the funeral home, leading the singing, and whatever else needs to be done.

Discussion Questions Prompting Additional Insight

1. What does 1 Corinthians 15:58 mean to you?
2. Discuss the principle that the key to success in anything is extra effort.
3. One day a man was walking along the beach when he saw a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, “What are you doing?” The youth replied, “I am throwing starfish back into the water. The surf is up and the tide is going out and if I don’t throw them back, they will die.” The man frowned and replied, “Son, don’t you realize there are miles of beach and thousands of starfish? You can’t possibly make a difference!” The boy listened respectfully as he bent down and threw yet another starfish back into the ocean. Then smiling at the man, he said, “I made a difference to that one!” What is the point of the story when it comes to the kingdom work of spreading the gospel?
4. A friend gets on a plane and flies to China to bring the gospel inside that Communist country. Not all of us have that

opportunity or are fitted to do what he does. In what ways can all of us “abound in kingdom work” (when it comes to foreign evangelism) for him and others who are willing to go?

5. Businesses motivate via a paycheck. Churches, on the other hand, motivate in the area of a payoff that will come later (“Your reward in heaven is great”). In other words, much of kingdom work is volunteer work. How can church leaders do a better job motivating volunteers to give the extra effort?
6. Discuss ways we can give extra effort when it comes to:
(1) preparing for Sunday services, (2) singing, (3) giving,
(4) greeting visitors, (5) advertising an upcoming gospel meeting,
etc.
7. What would you tell an older saint who says there isn’t much he/
she can do anymore?
8. How excited are you about the Lord’s work?