

A Labor Day Not in Vain

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Galatians 6:9)

I'll admit that Labor Day has never meant much more to me than a day off in September and the kickoff to the busy fall season looming around the corner. But the inspiration of Labor Day, a tribute to the workforce, is noteworthy because our economy depends on competent workers. (Just recall the past strikes by garbage workers or supermarket checkers to realize how much they can impact our daily lives.) But the focus of this holiday is somewhat near-sighted because many invaluable workers are excluded from recognition, namely homemakers. Their endless hours aren't dictated by a time clock, nor are their tireless efforts recompensed with a paycheck.

Similarly, workers in God's ministry won't expect to be honored in many Labor Day parades either. But for those who do labor in ministry, the holiday serves as an opportunity to examine the worthiness of our motives. Unworthy motives include the desire for human recognition, as exhibited by the Pharisees. Jesus said about them, “they have their reward (Matthew 6:2)” because the praise they so coveted was their only recompense. Likewise, we're warned against being motivated by the desire for human recognition. Such a fleeting and sadly inadequate payback thwarts the divinely intended blessing that we'd have otherwise received had our motive been proper.

On the other hand, a worthy motive doesn't aim to bring glory to self, but glory to God. Receiving His grace should humble us so that we gratefully learn to love as Christ loved—sacrificially as a servant. Moreover, the Holy Spirit produces Fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22). Selfish motives such as greed and self-promotion are counterproductive; only if we ‘weed them, not feed them’ can our spiritual fruit increase.

Furthermore, with spiritual labor comes true self-discovery. When we learn how God has gifted us spiritually to serve others, no longer do we aim for Self as the center of our focus. Rather, spiritual growth replaces one life with another, so that we shed the old and release the new. Just as a caterpillar must shed its cocoon to soar as a butterfly, so must we cast off the things that encumber spiritual flight. Even though life anew outside the safe cocoon isn't always easy, God always makes it worthwhile.

Therefore the motive for our labor is to please God rather than man. Remembering that God honors our work even if man doesn't, we can take heart. Others may misunderstand and not appreciate us, but God never does; hence He becomes our incentive to endure. For stretched ahead lies eternity where we'll fully comprehend the true value of our work. Indeed, we'll each stand at the Judgment seat of Christ to receive a reward for our works that were built with gold, silver and precious stones rather than wood, hay and stubble (1 Corinthians 3:12). This should further motivate all of God's servants to labor righteously, for when we behold the treasures in store for us we'll wish that we'd have labored even harder in our lifetime. Nonetheless, before His heavenly throne is where God's people will finally have a Labor Day worth infinitely more than just a holiday in September.

By Mary Nixon