



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

ISAIAH 40

JULY 2021

PARTNERS WITH GOD

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31 NRSV)

Recent surveys reveal that 52% of American workers feel burn out, which has spiked during the Covid-19 era. A myriad of factors contribute to it, but an obvious one is the vulnerability of individualistic isolation. The old western civilization icon of the self-made, self-sufficient, enlightened human is being exposed as the fraud it has always been. Leaders in all spheres, including the church, are suffering from burn out, flame out, and fall out. The often used excuse for busyness - the desire to burn out rather than rust out - is sounding somewhat hollow. We seem to think that doing good works will exempt us from depletion, so we continue to add to already busy

schedules. Our culture heaps praise on those who are busy, and often those anxious to impress will let it slip how full their calendar is:

“How are you doing, Charles?”

“Whew! So busy!”

“Glad to hear it. Keep it up.”

Yet shouldn't Christ-followers pause long enough to ask if God's assignments should lead to such depletion? Was Isaiah just dazzling with hyperbole when he promised:

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God likes work. He works. He commissioned us to work. So what turns work into something less than God intended? Presumption! Biblical history screams warnings regarding it. “Wait on the Lord” is a common theme. Psalms 106 is a great Old Testament example and 1 Corinthians 10 is a prime New Testament text. These scriptures reveal the intent of God to lead his people to more and more of His abundance. Each step is toward greater things, but the counsel that comes from working with God holds priority over the project to be done. Relationship always trumps productivity in God’s economy. Personal trust comes before willful obedience. He isn’t just concerned with getting a specific job done. He has angels that can do that. He delights in partnership with His sons and daughters. He would prefer us to give a cup of cold water with Him than have an ocean dug by us without His counsel.

Israel’s sin of presumption is described in two phrases: “They forgot His works”

and “They refused to wait on Him.” Their journey shouts warnings about moving without His initiation. Each time they moved without counsel, they experienced a form of destruction. As we read through Psalms 106, we see a series of events where they presumed to take on responsibilities they were not assigned. They demonstrated what humans do who don’t understand partnership with God. They started with self-will, sustained their work with self-effort, and concluded it with self-glory (or self-condemnation depending upon how well it turned out initially.) Then as now, anything begun by self-will requires self-energy and self-motivation. We only have a limited supply, so we will eventually be depleted. Our high hopes are dashed and disillusionment sets in. We are impatient and blame others and God. Needing affirmation for our own self-image, we seek the credit for accomplishments and feel demeaned when we fail. Since Paul says that the journey of Israel from Egypt to Canaan is for our example, let’s look at the lessons of the wilderness:

They were critical of the menu. Manna fell from heaven but they wanted meat. When they demanded the right to select the food, they were given quail, but became sick and many died. You’d think people would be content with food fresh daily from heaven, but they wanted something they could handle.

Manna had no recipe. No one really knew what it was. ("Manna" literally means: "What is it?")

They were jealous of Moses. They were critical of God's division of labor. Their equalitarian position demanded that everyone be not only equal in value, but equal in assignment. By despising God's choice of His leaders, they despised God. Fleshly thinking denies God's creative distinctives and demands sameness. Destruction!

Impatient with Moses for staying too long on the mountain, **they made their gold into a calf and worshiped a replica of an animal instead of the transcendent God.** It was a costly experience of impatience. Death!

When shown the land of promise, **they were overwhelmed at the opportunity and saw it totally as an obstacle.** They accused Moses and God of not caring and sending them on a fool's mission. Being critical, they couldn't be obedient. Only the grateful heart can be obedient.

They conquered Jericho easily by first getting God's counsel. Yet, they immediately reverted to self-determination, assuming that the next city of Ai should be no problem. Presumptuously, they attacked. Defeat!

God counseled them to avoid covenant with the inhabitants of the cursed land. **They had a better idea and made a covenant with the Gibeonites.** Sure enough, they began to adopt the pagan religion, marry pagan wives, and ultimately brought such wives into the camp of Israel as if it were the normal thing to do. Death!

God told them to eliminate all the enemies in the land. **They left a few.** Constant war.

They would not live with God as their only king and demanded an earthly one like the other nations. Saul was chosen. God was willing to bless him, but Saul couldn't wait for Samuel to do his priestly duties before a battle with the Philistines. Presumptuously, he assumed the role. He lost the kingdom. God raised up David.

In all these examples and more, they settled for less than the best. They refused to wait. They forgot His mighty works. It was costly. It still is. Our God is the unique God of the universe who works for those who wait for him (Isaiah 64:4). If we learn from the experiences of Israel, we will cry out to the Lord who still longs to work with us to do His mighty works on earth. He has chosen to work through human instruments. We are privileged to be His partners. It means we always work

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with and not for. Our impatience with circumstances and with others reveals our impatience with God our partner. It is a serious sin. Sin can be forgiven. As we confess, the light of His patience begins to shine. While we are waiting for His release to act, we can revisit His works. We can recount His works in the Old Testament. We can rejoice in the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and gift of the Spirit. We can look back over our own lives and testify of His faithfulness to find us, save us, bless us, engage us, and finally receive us into eternal glory. Because His counsel is precious, it is often hidden to the casual eye. But it can be found in the intimacy of the Spirit within us, the Scriptures in front of us, and the saints around us. We will more easily find His counsel in a community of correcting accountability. Loved by those wanting our best, we can be honest and open. We run toward accountability because we don't want to forfeit the best while muddling in less. God meets the searching heart with eagerness. After all, He is the one who started this "God-and-man-partnership" thing.

Impatience is not a lesser sin. Neither is presumption a virtue. They are both thieves stealing the joy of walking and working as God's partners on earth. Creation still awaits the people who live only to work at God's assignment, with God's presence, for God's glory. Since He is faithful to the end, we can

be also. No need to burn out, flame out, or fall out. We are God's partners.

In a time such as ours with so many perplexing problems facing us, we can either fall prey to the impulse to just do something, or we can wait on God. He is not impulsive, and He is not slow. He has a path to the best solution, and He longs to have His people working with Him. He sees more than we do, and He cares more than we do. We can give hope to those watching by waiting and working with calm confidence that our Father really is in charge. We are the light in the world, but not the flame-out light. We are the constant lamp in the darkness reflecting the true light of the world. We shine but we don't burn out.



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