

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Lord help me to Use my Energy

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Hello, today's talk is the latest in our series entitled "Lord help me to." We all have many resources, talents, gifts and aptitudes that we can use in the Lord's service and for His glory. However, it can often be difficult to clearly identify what these are and then how these can be deployed most effectively. I want to look at this subject by looking at various characters and stories from the Bible to see what lessons we can learn from them. Before we do this, I want to look at a few scriptures that would challenge us all as to why we should be deploying our energy, or indeed any other resource we have at our disposal in God's service.

I want to read first from Paul's epistle to the Romans chapter 12 verse 1. All our readings today will be from the New King James Version of the Scriptures unless otherwise stated.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

An animal sacrifice can obviously only be presented once and then it is killed. Paul is making the point here, however, that our sacrifice has to be a lifelong one in order to be of acceptable service to God. It would appear to me that this once for all presentation is the same as the sacrifice which is killed, we need to commit our lives to God and then live each day in the light of this. It is also really important to consider the verses before this one in chapter 11, that moves Paul to appeal to the Christians in Rome in this way. He explains in chapter 11 how the people of Israel have turned away from God by rejecting the Messiah and will be restored in a day to come. But in the meantime, individual Israelis such as himself have been brought into salvation by accepting Christ as Saviour and Lord. Paul is therefore so filled by the joy of this that in the last verse of chapter 11 he bursts forth in praise.

"For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

Surely it is by recognising the greatness of the One we serve, and what He has done for us, that we will find it easier to lay down our lives in His service. The Apostle Paul stresses this point further in his first epistle to the Corinthians chapter 6 verse 19 where we read:

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"

This is very radical talk, we are not our own! How often do we use the term, "Please yourself?" Used in a very innocent way no doubt, and yet cutting across what Paul is teaching us in these verses that we should, in fact, be looking to please God not ourselves in every situation. However,

this is not as easy to put into practice as it is to say the words because that human nature we all still have does want us to please ourselves not God, or indeed anybody else. "Me first" is the phrase that we hear so often and indeed, if you are anything like me, enters our own minds regularly. Paul also writes to the Romans about this in chapter 7 of that epistle. I am often encouraged myself to be reminded that even the great Apostle Paul had the same inner conflict that I do, for he writes in verse 15:

"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do."

He then goes on to explain that there is an internal warfare in the heart of every true believer between the sinful flesh and the new life given them through the Holy Spirit. We are not judged, however, on our own ability to withstand this sinful nature, as all who are in Christ Jesus will not come into condemnation. So, as the book of Romans lays out in what has been referred to as a courtroom drama, we must take confidence in the fact that we serve God because we have been saved by His matchless grace, and not in order to be saved and merit His favour. We serve because we are saved, not to be saved! This is one of the most important truths of Christianity because, if we do not fully grasp this, our lives will be one roller coaster of ups and downs as we serve God well in some scenarios, but then fail badly at other times. I was told many years ago that a good Roman can go anywhere, which simply means that if we have grasped the truths laid out in this wonderful epistle then all scripture will be easier for us to understand and practise.

So with these thoughts in our minds, as to why we should be prepared to use our energy in the Lord's service, let's look at some examples. It seems appropriate that we should actually start with the Apostle Paul since we have been reading from his epistles already. Before his Damascus Road conversion he was called Saul of Tarsus. We read of this event in Acts chapter 9 and every time thereafter that Paul, as he became known after his conversion to Christ, tells the story of the bright light that shone from Heaven and blinded him, quite literally bringing him to his knees, it grew brighter and brighter in his estimation. By the time we get to Acts chapter 26, when he is retelling the story of his conversion to King Agrippa, he says that the light was brighter than the noon day sun. For Paul, the greatness of that day, when he was converted to Christ, became all the more important the older he got, and drove him on in his service. Do we all cherish and appreciate the day that we gave our hearts and lives to Christ and were saved? Paul then tells King Agrippa about the voice of Jesus that he heard when he was knocked from his horse and blinded. Verse 16 of Acts chapter 26 reads:

"But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you."

Paul was called for a purpose. That was to be a minister and a witness. The meaning of this word minister is an official servant. Of what we may ask? In Paul's case, this was of the things he had seen, and those things that God subsequently revealed to him. Paul was picked out to be the mouthpiece of God of those truths revealed to him by the Holy Spirit and that he wrote in his epistles, which then formed a major part of the New Testament. In this respect we are different, we do not have things revealed to us that will form part of God's Word; but we are still called to serve God and to witness to what He has done in our lives.

When he was Saul of Tarsus, he put all of his energy into abiding by the laws of the strictest sect of the Jews, the Pharisees. He told King Agrippa that all who knew him could testify as to how he lived his life as a religious Jew. We read in Acts chapter 9 that he was so keen to stamp out the name of Jesus that he was "breathing out threats and murders and asked" for letters from the Jewish leaders permitting him to go to Damascus to seek out and destroy the Church there. It is clear, when we read of his pre-converted life, that all his energy was focussed on his Jewish

religion, all the tradition that went with it, and on destroying the Christian Church. The refocus of that energy was instant after his conversion. He was blind for three days and neither ate nor drank, but Ananias laid hands on him and he received his sight. Once he had something to eat and was strengthened, he right away began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I am pretty sure that, if this had happened to me, I would have been making excuses that I had been through a traumatic experience and should perhaps rest for a bit, enjoy the hospitality of my hosts, and regain my strength fully, before going into the public eye and the heat of battle. Not so for Paul! As we have already seen, faced with the same battles with the sinful nature that we all face, yet as a chosen vessel for God, he put that same religious zeal of a few days previous, now sanctified, into the proclamation of the Gospel.

The next person I want to think about who used his energy to great effect was King David. I have been struck recently by the story of David and Goliath and the enthusiasm that David, not then a mighty king but a teenager who looked after his father's sheep, showed as he ran to face the giant warrior named Goliath. It is always great to see youngsters running around enjoying their play. When we are young, we seemed to want to get to places we were excited about as soon as we could, so we ran. As we get older both the enthusiasm and ability to get somewhere quickly diminishes; but spiritually this should not be the case. As the story of David and Goliath, together with running everywhere, was such a big part of many of our lives as children, perhaps it is a good time to remind ourselves of some lessons from it.

We read the story in the first book of Samuel chapter 17. In the previous chapter, we learn that David had already been chosen by God, and anointed by the prophet Samuel, to be the next king of Israel after King Saul. He was chosen in preference to his seven older brothers who, from a purely natural and physical point of view, all seemed to be better equipped to be king, but God had told Samuel in chapter 16 verse 7 when he thought the oldest brother Eliab would be king;

“But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

So David, as the king in waiting, then used his energies in two very different pursuits: he spent time playing the harp to sooth King Saul when he was troubled then he also spent time in the wilderness looking after his fathers sheep. It is really important to note that although this young man was aware that greatness lay in his future, in the meantime he was prepared to use his energy in very different, but both very lowly, pursuits; and to give them his all for as long as it was required. It is sometimes quite easy to think that some aspect of service is below us and not give it our full attention; that is not how God sees things.

We then see in chapter 17 of First Samuel, that the armies of the Israelites under King Saul were faced off against the army of the Philistines, each on a mountainside, with the Valley of Elah between them. Just imagine the noise and the hostility as they challenged each other! It is really important to notice in verse 1 that they were in a place given to Judah. They were in the Promised Land, the place God had promised the children of Israel so long before; and the Philistines had no right to be there. Yet, there they were the enemies of the people of God, and they put forward their champion, Goliath the giant, to challenge and ridicule God's people. What a fearsome sight he must have been. He was around 9 feet and 9 inches tall, what a size of a man! I am always impressed as we look on the outward appearance of some of the big sportsmen of our day, some who are close enough to 7 feet tall, but this giant took things to a new level. Then in verses 4 to 7 we get the details of his armour and weaponry which are simply mind-blowing. The response of the children of Israel was understandable from a natural point of view, they were terrified! The situation is summed in verses 10 and 11:

“And the Philistine said, “I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.” When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.”

This went on for forty days, morning and evening. I can almost hear him now, “Give me a man.” In a spiritual sense, there are still giants today challenging the people of God. Satan uses many things that are contrary to God’s word, the Bible, and if we rely on our own strength and energy, we will also be fearful. But David goes in the strength of his God and uses his natural energy to bring about the great victory. I would also like to point out a wonderful answer to the shout of the enemy to “give me a man.” Just as David was chosen by God to defeat this giant, so Jesus Christ was sent by God into this world to become a Man and defeat all the powers of Satan by His death on the cross of Calvary. So, the time came when David was sent by his father Jesse to take supplies to his three older brothers on the battlefield. In verse 17, he was instructed to run to his brothers at the camp. God’s business requires haste and once we feel we have been sent we should do so without delay; and this is exactly what David did. He rose early in the morning and did as his father had commanded. This is a great picture of our Lord Jesus who, as a young boy, made it clear to his earthly parents that he must be about his Father’s business.

David then arrived at the battle scene and met his brothers. Two things are striking here, he saw first-hand the fear of the Israelite army. He also met with his oldest brother’s scorn, who told him that he should not have come to the front line and accused him of only coming to see the battle. Surely these two powerful negative things would have turned this young man back to where he was comfortable but no, he was resolute in the task he was to fulfil. Are we too easily turned aside by negative comments or the size of the task in hand? If our motivation is correct as David’s was, then surely, we won’t be thwarted. I love David’s answer, in verse 29, to the criticism: “Is there not a cause?” When we are feeling lacking in motivation and energy to carry out some task for God, whether great or small, if we remind ourselves that there is surely a cause then we will be invigorated. What greater cause could there possibly be than the glorification of the Name and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am always challenged when I see people championing causes that may be very noble but only have a bearing on this life - our “cause” will have significance for all eternity.

However, unlike everybody else, David was not terrified and his words soon reached King Saul, who sent for him. King Saul tried to dissuade this young man from even thinking he could possibly fight and kill this great man of war. David responded to this in verses 34 to 37 by replaying events in his earlier life when God had been with him and had brought him through great dangers. He was very specific in remembering the times when a lion and a bear had threatened his father’s sheep and he had fought and killed them and rescued the sheep. He was also very much aware that God had been with him then and He would be now when he fought this giant. Right to the very end of David’s life he rehearsed the times God had preserved him and this started when he was a teenager. He persuaded King Saul that God would be with him again and that he didn’t need the king’s armour. So David went to meet the giant who ridiculed him, but David’s response was clear and succinct. Verse 45 reads:

“Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.””

After stating the power that he came in, he confidently told the giant the outcome that would follow; and then verse 48 tells us that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the giant. The honour of God and His people meant so much to David that, when everyone else shrank back in fear, he ran head on to meet the giant. Surely if we have the honour of the Lord and the needs of His people before us, we will have the energy to run to meet the challenges and carry out the service required of us.

I want to finish by thinking about another two people who, after coming into contact with the risen Christ, suddenly had renewed energy for the task in hand. We read about them in Luke chapter 24. It was the day of the Resurrection, and two disciples were walking back to their village, Emmaus, from Jerusalem, a journey of about 7 miles. They were discussing the incredible events that had just taken place and a Man drew alongside them. He began to speak to them about the things that were predicted in Moses and all the scriptures to happen to their Messiah, the Christ. Then they reached their home and invited this Stranger to come in. They were tired from all that had happened and from the long walk they had just made. Once inside, Jesus made Himself known to them as they ate their meal and then He disappeared from them. They then knew that the Lord was risen and what impact did this have on them? The tiredness had suddenly gone and their strength was renewed so much so that they went straight back out onto the road and walked the seven miles back to Jerusalem to give the other disciples the wonderful news which they had just experienced. The Lord had risen indeed. The wonderful old hymn sums up how they must have felt that day and that we should still feel now:

We serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today
I know that He is living, whatever men may say.

The chorus goes on to say, "He lives, He lives".

Praise God!

(Alfred H Ackley 1887 - 1960)

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on 'Use my energy', talk number T1234 and I trust the message has been a real encouragement and a challenge to us all.

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