

It's Never for Nothing!

By Mary Kane

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In order to celebrate end of the school year, Granger Christian School schedules a few fun days for our students. Two years ago, our principal asked the teachers to create an "Amazing Race" type game for our students to play. After school, one of my colleagues and I immediately began working on the clues that would lead our students throughout our campus on a search for a sweet reward.

Applying ourselves diligently to our task, The sixth grade teacher and I, spent an hour and a half after school developing six imaginative, rhythmic clues for our students to decipher. Before we left school that night, I emailed the clues to our principal and went home to a well-earned rest.

The next day, however, we found out that our principal and a couple of other teachers decided not to use our clues and wrote a new list of clues. We had a moment of frustration and aggravation as the sixth grade teacher and I realized that all of our effort and work had been for nothing.

Thankfully, this will never happen concerning our work for the Lord; God promises us that our labor will never be in vain.

Please take a moment to pray. Ask the Lord to fill you with His Holy Spirit and give you insight into His Word.

Now, please read 1 Corinthians 15:57-58

According to this verse, what are we to be?

We are to be *steadfast, immovable, and abounding*.

Let's take a look at these words in the original language and see what we can learn about how we are to conduct ourselves as Christians in our work in the Lord.

Steadfast: *sitting, sedentary, firm, those who are fixed in purpose*. We are to be fixed in purpose concerning the work that the Lord has given us. If we are *sitting*, we have no intention of leaving our work. Choice is involved in the decision to sit; we *choose* to stay at our post. In short, we have purposed in our heart not to move and nothing can convince us to do otherwise.

Immovable: Derived from the Greek word *ametakinētos* which means *not to be moved from one's place, firmly persistent, to not move away from the hope to which one is attached*. The work that God has given us provides hope that our lives will be worth something in the end. And through our work in the Lord we will offer hope to the many millions of people who currently live in darkness.

The decision to remain steadfast and immovable in the work that God has given us is connected to the faith that we have concerning the power of that work. If we sincerely believe that God has called us to bear much fruit, that our work will never be in vain and that it is making a difference in the lives of others, we will persevere in that work regardless of the challenges that we face.

Please fill in the missing words from verse 58:

"Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable,
_____ in the work of the Lord."

In the NKJV, the missing words are *always abounding*. In the Greek the word *always* transliterates as *pantote* which means "always, ever, at all times."

What kinds of "times" have you been through lately?

I've been through good times, hard times, easy times, bad times, suffering times, funny times, happy times, painful times, worshipful times, sick times, powerful times, goodbye times, unemployment times, empty-nest times and growing times just to name a few. Probably, you have too. During all of these times, God still wants us to abound in our work for Him.

Keep in mind that there may be "times" when the work you are doing for Him changes. The "times" you are experiencing can change in a matter of seconds. For example, two summers ago my plans to serve in VBS changed with one phone call from my son; he had been in a bad accident. My ministry focus that summer was suddenly refocused inside my own home, helping my son to recover from his injuries.

Pantote is made up of two smaller Greek words, one of which is *hote*. *Hote* means "while, as long as, as soon as, after that, when." This part of the definition reminds us that God still has meaningful important work for us to do *while* we are unemployed, *as long as* we draw breath, *as soon as* we truly repent from that season of sin, *after that* embarrassing situation and *when* we feel useless, under qualified and unimportant.

Please write your own definition about what it means to *always* work for the Lord.

Now let's take a look at what it means to *abound* in our work for the Lord.

In the Greek, the word *abound* is *perisseuo* which means "to over flow, to be over, to excel, more than expected, 'abounding' as used of a flower going from a bud to full bloom." Our lives should overflow with good works, ministry and obedience to Christ rather than TV, shopping or reading novels.

With what do you want your life to "overflow" (hospitality, mission work, service to the elderly etc.)?

I want my life to overflow with ministering to others through the preaching and the teaching of His Holy Word! So many years of my life I wasted living for myself; pouring my energy into pleasing my flesh and living to my own desires. What an empty, hopeless pursuit. Thankfully, my Father delivered me from myself. Now, by the grace of God, much of my free time is spent in the work that God has for my life. And when I reach the end of this life, I long to hear my Father say, "Well done my good and faithful servant"!

God's Word says that we are to "abound in the *work* of the Lord." In the Greek, one of the words for work is *ergon* which means "business, employment, enterprise; any product whatever; anything accomplished by hand, art, industry or mind; an act, deed or thing done; *the course of conduct which springs from faith*" (emphasis mine).

From what you just learned about *work*, please make of list of things a person could do to serve the Lord.

The list is endless! You do not have to be an ordained preacher or an international missionary in order to live your life for Christ. I believe the key to this definition is *the course of conduct which springs from faith*. In other words, you need to do the work which you know by faith that God has anointed you to do whether you are a mechanic, an artist, a teacher, an athlete, a construction worker or a landscaper.

God has given us a promise; He promised us that if we are doing what he has called us to do, our work will not be in vain, it will have eternal impact. The house a construction worker builds will not simply be a house, it will be a blessing to another family. The construction worker can also affect his world for Christ by building relationships with his coworkers while on the job site. The garden a landscaper creates will not simply be a garden; it will be a place that witnesses to others about the Creator of the universe.

How does your work affect the world for Christ?

Please go back and read our Scripture for today again.

I was very surprised when I looked up the definition for the word *labor* in the original language; I think you will be too! From Greek to English, the word *work* transliterates as *kopos* which means "a beating, a beating of the breast, labor, intense labor combined with toil and trouble, the labor to which love prompts and which voluntarily assumes and endures troubles and pains for the salvation of others."ⁱ

The last part of that definition precisely describes the work of our Savior on the cross... scourging, insults, mockery and nails. But, Christ for the joy set before Him, endured the cross. And look at what the cross of Christ accomplished... the salvation of the world! Sometimes we believe that suffering and pain will destroy our work in the Lord, but God promises that our work shall not be in vain!

Why do we assume that because we are doing the Lord's work that everything will go smoothly? From the basis of the definition of *kopos* we can expect that trouble and suffering will be a part of our ministry. Some people choose not to live for the Lord in an attempt to bypass suffering and pain. My life before Christ was not without significant pain, but I'd rather face the trouble and suffering that I've experienced in Christ than without Christ; because in Him, every pain has a purpose.

All of the suffering we will endure as we are working for the Lord will come from one of three sources: our flesh, the world or Satan. Two are external forces, one internal. All three of these enemies work against us to thwart our efforts in the Lord, trying to persuade us to quit our work.

With which of these three enemies do you struggle the most?

I think I struggle the most with my own flesh. I am very selfish and prideful and I often have to beat down an attitude of entitlement that exists within my soul.

Now, let's take a look at one final word from our text today.

Please fill in the missing word in verse 58:

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in _____ in the Lord.”

The word *vain* means “empty, devoid of truth, without effect, empty handed. It also means “an empty vessel and without a gift.” Imagine that you have received an invitation to a birthday party for a close friend. Upon arriving at the party, you hand your friend her gift and urge her to open it immediately. However, upon removing the color- coordinated bow and paper, your friend discovers the box is empty. That is the idea behind the concept of *vain*; looks good on the outside but empty on the inside. Likewise, our works may look good on the outside, but if they aren’t done “in the Lord,” they are empty—for nothing.

Aren’t you glad that God promised that our work in Him is not in vain? I know that I am. I want to know that what I’m doing through Him has a purpose, that it will make a difference and that I am affecting my world for Christ. I need a reason to get up every day. At this point in my life, there is nothing more satisfying than the feeling that God has used me to accomplish a work for His kingdom in the life of another person.

Perhaps you are a new Christian or have just recently learned that God has called and anointed every Christian for specific work and are unsure on how to get started. Below is a list of Bible verses that contain the *Christian’s Job Description*.

Please look up each verse and record what you learn about our work in the Lord.

Ephesians 2:10

1 Peter 2:9-10

Matthew 28:19-20

1 Peter 4:10

John 15:8

As Christians, God has called us to make disciples of all nations, to proclaim His praises, to do good works, to use our gifts to edify the body of Christ, to bear fruit, and to bring Him glory.

This list is by no means comprehensive; can you think of any other things we are called to do as Christians?

In what ministry are you currently serving or planning to serve?

What will you do this week to further that work?

In closing, be encouraged! Your work in the Lord may be long, hard and difficult right now, but God promises that it will never be in vain. Persevere in your work and wait for the blessing of the Lord!

*“That you may walk worthy of the Lord,
fully pleasing [Him],
being fruitful in every good work
and increasing in the knowledge of God.”*

By Mary Kane

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ⁱ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *kopos* (Strong's 2873)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2011. 1 Jul 2011. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G2873&t=KJV> >