

Do What You Can

Don't Despise Little

Too often, we will not do things because we think that they are not important. When we have what we conceive to be a task of major significance we become easily motivated. However, in the daily affairs of our lives, we usually fail to see any great importance in what we are doing. Consequently, we are prone to waste time and opportunity. After thirty years in the gospel ministry, I confess that this has been one of Satan's major and most effective weapons against me. I see how big the task is, and it is so overwhelming I am sometimes paralyzed into virtual inactivity. I see others who seem to be doing great things, and what I am doing seems to pale into insignificance in comparison of what they are accomplishing. I have had a great deal of trouble with these kinds of thoughts, but I have also had some victories in overcoming them. I would like to share with you some of the things that have helped me.

I ran across a quotation by one Sydney Smith. I do not even know who he is, but it has helped me a great deal. He said, "**It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can do only a little. Do what you can.**" This is a wonderful thought and reminds us instantly of what Mary, the mother of our Lord, told those round about her when they were at the marriage feast in Cana. She said, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." What did Jesus tell them to do and how did they respond? In [Joh 2:7](#) we read, "Jesus saith unto them, 'Fill the water pots with water.' **And they filled them up to the brim.**" This filling up the water pots was a rather menial task, but they did their best at it. We can do no differently. It is usually impossible to accomplish a great task all at once; we must constantly and consistently chip away at it.

When the Lord drove the enemies of Israel out of Caanan, He did not do it all at once. We read in [De 7:22](#), "And the LORD thy God will put out those nations before thee **by little and little**: thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee." This is how we must work at our tasks—by little and little.

Too often we procrastinate because we do not think we have a period of uninterrupted time that is long enough for us to get the task accomplished. We think that eventually we will have a sufficient time of leisure to begin a certain job or to work on a particular goal. Usually this time will never come. We will always have daily responsibilities that claim our time and attention. We must learn to use relatively short periods of time **on a consistent basis** if we are to accomplish much in our lives.

I have been inspired and helped by studying the lives of several people who learned to use every opportunity that came their way to work toward goals they had set in their lives. I will share some of their experiences with you now.

Robert Dick Wilson

One of the greatest Old Testament scholars who has ever lived was Robert Dick Wilson, who taught at Princeton University and later at Westminster Theological Seminary. Wilson was an authentic genius. I am not a genius and most of the people who read this will not be, but the way that Wilson applied himself to his studies is a great example for all of us. I recommend that you read the account of his life recorded in *Which Bible?* by David Otis Fuller. Wilson was at home

in over forty Semitic languages. At the age of twenty-five he could read the New Testament in nine different languages. He could repeat from memory a Hebrew translation of the New Testament without missing a single syllable. He could do the same thing with large portions of the Old Testament.

These are incredible feats. How did he do it? Let us hear from Philip E. Howard:

He tells us he used his spare time. When he went out for a walk he would take a grammar with him and when he sat down to rest he would take out the book, study it a little and learn what he could. He not only made use of little bits of time, moreover he had a plan which governed his life. If he had not had such a plan and set goals to accomplish it, he would not have been motivated to take advantage of each spare moment.

What was his plan? Let us hear from Wilson, himself. "When I got to Heidelberg I made a decision. I decided - and I did it with prayer - to consecrate my life to the study of the Old Testament. I was twenty-five then; and I judged from the life of my ancestors that I should live to be seventy; so that I should have forty-five years to work. I divided the period into three parts. The first fifteen years I would devote to the study of the languages necessary. For the second fifteen I was going to devote myself to the study of the text of the Old Testament; and I reserved the last fifteen years for the work of writing the results of my previous studies and investigations, so as to give them to the world. And the Lord has enabled me to carry out that plan almost to a year."

Brothers, my goals and yours may not be as ambitious as were Wilson's, but we still need to have some. How old are you? How long do you think you will live? What do you intend to accomplish with the rest of your life? Which Scriptural subjects do you plan to master? Are there any portions of Scripture that you plan to memorize? What books do you intend to read?

Speaking of this great man, Dr. Edward Young wrote, "It is men such as Wilson, men who have not feared hard work, who have not avoided difficult problems, and who have been willing to join battle with the enemy that God has used to build His church."

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Solzhenitsyn is one of the best, most courageous and most prolific writers of modern times. He is a Russian who spent many years in the Soviet prison system and in both internal and external exile. His writings about the horrible conditions in the Soviet prisons did much to cause the dissolution of the USSR. Solzhenitsyn has written many, many books. However, due to the conditions in which he was forced to live for many years of his life, he would have written very little if he had not made the best of his situation and written when he could. If he had waited for the ideal time and for favorable conditions, he would have grown old with many of his goals not accomplished. He wrote an autobiographical book entitled *The Oak and the Calf*. In this work he described the conditions under which he lived and wrote. Many of his books were written in secret. The secret police were constantly watching him and would have seized his manuscripts if they had found them. Often he wrote late at night, hand writing his material in tiny letters on

small scraps of paper. He would often have to hide these scraps, perhaps in a knothole in a tree. He seldom had long, uninterrupted periods in which to write. He wrote three gigantic volumes of *The Gulag Archipelago* under these conditions.

The point I am obviously trying to make is that much can be done, even under very trying circumstances, if one is determined, resourceful, and consistent. Solzhenitsyn is an old man now. He must certainly have a great feeling of satisfaction and gratitude that he did what he could when he could. He finally was exiled from the USSR and came to Vermont. There he continued to write. He had access to many books. He had a large room and many tables where he could lay out his manuscripts. He had research assistants. He got a lot of work done. However, much of his most important work, for which he was awarded many prizes and other honors, was done under very difficult circumstances.

Our work may not be the same as his, but we can learn much from his example. After reading this I pray that no one will complain that the time and circumstances are not right for you to do what God has laid on your heart. I pray that, with the help of God, you will **find** a way to do it.

Henry Morris

Truly one of the heroes of modern times in conservative Christian circles would have to be Dr. Henry Morris. Dr. Morris began his career as a civil engineer. Very early in his career he became vitally involved in the creation/evolution battle. Most Christians had virtually capitulated to the theistic evolutionists who attempted to reconcile the Bible with some kind of evolutionary mechanism. Dr. Morris rightly considered this to be an unacceptable compromise. He went against the tide facing what seemed to be unconquerable opposition. He had few resources compared to those of his opposition. He wrote books, started colleges, made speeches, and engaged in many other related activities. How did he possibly do all this? He was **motivated, organized, and consistent**. He drew his motivation from his unswerving conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. He was organized in that he did not waste time but got the most out of each day. His consistency lay in the fact that he steadily worked each and every day. Lectures written for the classroom also became chapters in his books. Speeches became chapters in books or tracts and pamphlets.

He did not have a great deal of money or a large staff. His mother, who was a devoted Christian, typed many of his manuscripts. The volume and quality of work that this man has turned out has been amazing. Now that he is in the sunset of his life, he must derive great satisfaction and thanksgiving that he did not "nickel and dime" his time away, but he redeemed his minutes and hours for the service of his Master. Will you feel that way when you reach that stage in your life?

The Old Shepherd

One of the most inspiring true stories I have ever read was told by Karen Burton Mains in her book *Making Sunday Special*. She related a story which was originally told by a journalist in a nature magazine. This journalist had encountered a shepherd in a mountainous area of France. He spent the night with the shepherd in his hut. Right before bed time he saw the shepherd take some acorns out of a bag and closely examine and count them. Upon inquiring, he found that each evening the shepherd always counted out one hundred acorns with the aim of planting them

the next day. He had done this each day for several years. It is easy to see that consistently followed this practice would lead to the planting of 36,500 oak trees in a year's time. Done for ten years this would mean the planting of 365,000 trees! The shepherd had been at this for a number of years and it was evident that things were beginning to change on the mountainside.

Several years later the journalist returned to the scene where he found the shepherd, who had become an old man, still consistently following his daily practice of planting the acorns. The reporter was astonished at the change which had taken place in the countryside. The trees had grown until they comprised a small forest. The root structure had provided for a watershed. Forest foliage had grown up under the trees and many animals had made their homes there. It was absolutely amazing what the consistent, tireless efforts of one man had done.

If this man had been spasmodic and inconsistent in his lifestyle, these astounding results would never have taken place. He did not plant the entire forest in a day or in a year. He just did a comparatively little bit each day. Over the years the cumulative results were absolutely amazing. Can you imagine the tremendous sense of satisfaction this simple old shepherd must have felt in the waning years of his life as he looked at the small forest on the hill side? How thankful he must have felt for **each day's work** over the past several decades. It would have been too late if he had waited until the last several years of his life and then had made an intense and frenzied effort to plant the hillside with trees.

God has probably not called on you to plant a forest, but he has called you out of darkness into light to do His work. Are you as consistent as this old shepherd was? This old man just let the world go by while he quietly and constantly did what God had called him to do. The results were amazing. The results of your life, consistently pursued, can also be amazing and God-honoring.

What about You?

What do you hope to accomplish in your ministry? What truths would you like to master from God's word? How many portions of Scripture, even whole chapters, would you like to memorize so that you could meditate and preach from them? Is there anything that you would like to share with God's children on the written page? Do you want to leave any of the results of your studies to your children and others of the coming generations? These are weighty questions which you should take time to think about. When you have reached some conclusions about what you should do, you should devise a **plan**. This plan may have to be altered from time to time, but if you do not aim at anything you are sure to hit it!

My Experience

I do not have a lot to brag about in these matters. I have failed in many ways. Procrastination and discouragement have been two of Satan's most potent weapons used against me. As I look back over thirty years in the ministry, I wish I had done much, much more.

However, I have had some successes, and I would like to share some of them with you. I had to work my way through college. I went to school full-time and worked at least thirty hours a week. When I began to have some thoughts about the ministry, I wondered what I was going to do. Where would I ever find time to study? Would I just have to wait until I had completed my

college work before I began to study my Bible in earnest? In my case I was blessed to have a job that did not require too much concentrated thought once I was trained to do it. I was an "order picker" at Sears, Roebuck, and Company. I soon memorized where all the catalog items were located and I could get them and process the orders almost on "automatic pilot." I began to carry Scriptures, written on index cards, in my pocket. I wrote down many of the Scriptures which were used as proof texts for our articles of faith. I would go over these as I went about my work. Even though my job was not a very pleasant one, I spent many happy hours as I worked while almost in a world of my own. My feet were at Sears, but my head and my heart were in heaven!

I became well-grounded in many of our cardinal doctrines in this way. After a Scripture has been well **memorized** then one can do a lot of **meditating** on it. As I began to memorize more and more Scriptures, I became aware of how one part of the Bible related to other parts. One passage would shed great light on others. Studying the Bible can be compared to putting a jigsaw puzzle together. When you begin, it is difficult to see the big picture. However, as you patiently and consistently put one little piece here and another little piece there, the picture begins to take shape. In Bible study as in many other things, the Scripture in [Ga 6:9](#) is pertinent: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Over the years I have tried to develop many different plans to be consistent in my studying, memorizing, meditating, and related activities. Often I have had to revise my goals and methods, but I still glad I have had some methods or I would not have even accomplished what little I have done. I have chosen certain goals at the beginning of the year and monitored myself to see if these were accomplished. I have used driving time behind the steering wheel of an automobile to do a lot of meditating and review memory work. (I do not recommend driving time to memorize new Scriptures. You have to be too mentally involved in this kind of thing to be a safe driver. I had several close calls this way, until I finally learned my lesson.)

When studying, I have tried to commit my thoughts to writing, even if no one would ever see the writing but myself. There is something about writing that forces you to focus more intently and to clarify your thoughts. Never throw your notes away. File them according to some system where you can examine them later. Some things you think you will never forget you will find that you will certainly forget.

A Challenge

I would like to challenge each of you to determine to memorize several Scriptures with which to teach each of the cardinal doctrines that are most surely believed among us. Do you know ten passages from memory that teach the doctrine of Total Depravity? If not, shame on you! Get to work today. What about the glorious doctrine of Unconditional Election? What about the Biblical teaching of Particular Redemption? Do you know ten or so Scriptures from memory that teach the truth of Irresistible Grace? What about the Preservation of the saints?

Can you accurately define and illustrate from the Bible such words as **justification**, **propitiation**, **redemption**, etc. If someone were to ask you to teach immediately on the doctrine of the Resurrection, would you be able to do so? How much do you know about Bible **prophecy**? Can you defend your views on eschatology (the doctrine of the last things)? Do you even have any views on this subject?

What do the Scriptures teach about baptism? Could you defend yourself against a well-informed baby sprinkler? What do you know about the Lord's Supper? Are you well-informed on congregational church polity? Are you a good leader of God's people or do you just let the church drift along and do the best they can?

Are you well acquainted with church history, particularly Baptist history, and even more particularly with Primitive Baptist history? Can you distinguish between what is truly Biblical and which is merely traditional?

Get to studying, my brethren, so that you can hear someday, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Zack Guess

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