

Surrounded by Opportunities

I am sure we have all heard silly sayings about opportunities such as, “When opportunity knocked I was away” or “When my ship came in I was at the train station.” Some people seem to have everything going their way and no matter what they attempt, they are always successful. Too often, however, we fail to recognize the work behind the success. Thomas Edison is most famous for inventing the light bulb but he actually held 1,039 patents. With regard to the light bulb we are familiar with the quote, “We now know a thousand ways not to build a light bulb.” He also had other similar quotes such as, “I never failed once. It just happened to be a two-thousand step process.” The point is that Edison never allowed what we may perceive as failure to stop him.

When we think of opportunity, Edison had another great quote, “Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.” Opportunity is not something that magically appears and gives us what we want with little or no effort on our part. Those who are successful at whatever they do have that success because they were willing to work at something and not give up. Proverbs 20:4 reads, “A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.” If you put no effort out there, you gain nothing in return. Unfortunately we live at a time when people want something for nothing. “I deserve it” or “It’s my right” are phrases on the lips of so many and too often people look for the easy way out of things. In both the Old and New Testaments, however, there is a strong emphasis on the need to work. II Thessalonians 3:10 tells us, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”

There is plenty of teaching in the Bible that tells us about the importance of physical work and that as Christians, we are to take that seriously. However, the Bible is not a book that focuses on the physical but the spiritual. There is good instruction on how to live my physical life but it is all with the spiritual well being in mind. In John 6:27 Jesus said, “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life...” Also in Matthew 9:37 Jesus says, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” To put it another way, the opportunities are all around us. Sometimes they walk through our doors but most of the time we have to work the fields. If you could survey the church I think you will find that all congregations want good, solid growth. It seems, though, that this growth is left in the hands of a few. Looking at the example of the first century church we see there was growth because of the enthusiasm of the Christians and their willingness to spread the gospel. When Jesus said pray for workers he did not mean to simply increase the number of preachers. Growth takes work from all of us. We do not all do the same thing but we are all involved. As we learned from Edison, success comes from doing and not giving up. We may not be inventing the light bulb, but we must all let our lights shine so others can see. I hope you do not simply read this and then set it down. Accept the challenge to be God’s worker in the fields.