



ABS.1.82.207(1-71)

National Library of Scotland



B000059893

Donald Mac Kinnon

Aberdeen

11, Feby. 1922

Handwritten text, possibly a title or header.

Handwritten text, possibly a name or date.

Handwritten text, possibly a date or reference.

ARE YOU

LABOURING FOR GOD?

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—ACTS ix. 6.

"Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's"—1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

READER!—Have you solemnly professed the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, pledged yourself to be his, and joined yourself in holy fellowship to his little flock? Do you feel and realize your obligations of redeeming love, and are you experiencing peace and joy in the assurance of pardon and reconciliation through the blood of the cross? What, then, is the evidence you are giving of your discipleship? Have you not only dissolved your connection with an ungodly world, but renounced its friendship, as being at enmity with God, but are you spending and being spent in the service of your Lord? Is it not the grand business of your life to glorify God, and advance His cause all around you? Know you that you are not your own? You are Christ's purchased possession—a member of Christ's body—a temple of the Holy Spirit—"the salt of the earth"—no longer at liberty to live to yourself, and for your own personal and selfish gratification, but bound to live for God, and for the advancement of His work. To you much has been given, and from you much will be required.

Having asked and found the answer to the momentous question, "What must *I* do to be saved?" have you put this other question, "What can *I* do that *others* may be saved?" Are you so alive to the state of the unconverted, that you feel a necessity laid upon you to put forth every effort for their salvation, devoting time, strength, talents, influence to this end? Do you realize the infinite worth and eternal destinies of immortal souls, and your responsibility in relation to them? You are a *steward*, and have a trust committed to you, of which you must soon render an account. Wherever your

lot has been cast—whatever your worldly calling may be—whether the circle in which you move be wide or narrow—whether you possess wealth, and talents, and influence, or are a humble, unlettered hard-labouring man—still you are a steward; and it is required of stewards that they be faithful—faithful to themselves, faithful to their souls, faithful as fellow-workers with God. Have you seriously thought of this? Have you ever considered what it is to labour for God?

“There are some so-called Christians who never seem to work at all. At least they work none for Christ. They lay claim to the name of Christian as their undoubted birthright, and are blinded enough in their self-complacency to fancy that they deserve it. But they work none for Christ. They speak none for Christ. They have never even sought to glorify him. His honour, his kingdom, his cause, are things, or rather words, of no practical meaning to them. As for self-denial or sacrifice for his sake, or in behalf of his people, they never thought of such a thing. And as for seeking to win souls to him, that is altogether out of their range of duty or circle of exertion. ‘These are wells without water, trees whose fruit withereth—twice dead, plucked up by the root.’ Eternity is to their eye nothing but distant vacancy.

“There are other Christians who work, but they are not faithful and earnest. They move forward in a certain track of duty, but it is with weary footstep. Their motions are constrained and cold. They do a good many things, devise a good many schemes, see many excellent things; but the vigorous pulse of warm life is wanting. Zeal, glowing zeal, elastic and untiring, is not theirs. There is more about them of the machine than the man. They neither burn themselves nor do they kindle others. They are neither inspired nor do they inspire.

“There are others who are in earnest in labouring, but it is the earnestness of mere impulse. They are earnest only by fits and starts. They cannot be safely counted on, for their fervour depends so much on the humour of the moment. At one time none can be more zealous than they—at another, none more indifferent. A naturally impulsive temperament, of which they are not sufficiently aware, and which they have not sought to crucify, renders them irregular and uncertain in their movements. These are difficult to deal with, and sometimes a little dangerous too. Their intermittent earnestness effects comparatively little. They do and undo. They build up and they pull down. They kindle and quench the flame alternately.

“There are others who are always in earnest in their labour, but it is the earnestness of bustle and restlessness. They cannot live

at in the midst of stirring and scheming, and moving to and fro. Their temperament is of that nervous, tremulous, impatient kind, that any thing like rest or retirement is positive restraint and pain to them. These seldom effect much themselves, but they are often useful, by their perpetual stir and friction, for keeping or setting others in motion, and preventing stagnation around them. Their incessant motion prevents their being filled within with the needed grace. Their continual contact with the outward things of religion hinders their inward growth, and mars their spirituality.

“There are others somewhat like these last, yet not entirely of the same tremulous mould. They are steady, persevering, earnest workers, not labouring by fits and starts, nor stirring and bustling if quiet were pain. They work with energy and patience, ‘not ceasing in well-doing.’ Yet there is something wanting. They work so much more than they pray, that they are often like vessels without oil either for themselves or others. They grudge no toil or sacrifice; they are always ready and at their post; yet they so much neglect the inward preparation, that their hours of communion with God bear a very small proportion to those of their intercourse with their fellow-men. Their light is dim. Its reflection upon a dark world is faint indeed. They take but little pains to increase its brightness, and remove all interposing shadows; so that, though they do possess light, yet it shines with feeble and ineffectual ray.

“The true labour for God is different from all these. It possesses some elements in common with some of these, yet it is not the same. It is a thing of depth and intensity. It is a thing of solemnity, and greatness, and power. It carries ever about with it the air of calm and restful dignity. It is fervent, but not feverish; energetic, but not excited; speedy in all its doings, but never hasty; confident, but not timid or selfish; resolute and fearless, but not rash; unobtrusive, and sometimes, it may be, silent, yet making all around it feel its influence; full of joy and peace, yet without parade or noise; overflowing in tenderness and love, yet at the same time faithful and true. And all this comes forth from a soul at peace with God, and living in the realizing consciousness of assured reconciliation with its Father in heaven; for no motives however animating, no influences however stimulating, can ever produce real zeal for God apart from the peace and joy of God within. It is the joy of the Lord that is our strength. It is in knowing our standing and our obligations, as redeemed with the blood of God’s eternal Son, that we feel as Paul felt when he said, ‘I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise.’

“*Enoch's* was a life of labour for God. He walked with God. Amid the ripening corruptions of a world that was hastening on to its crisis, and departing from God, he maintained his faith, and love, and zeal. The tranquil blessedness of his holy walk, the separation which he maintained from a world of sinners, the simple-hearted faith which he displayed, the burning zeal with which he warned and reproved, and the solemn message which he bore about with him, during his brief career, ‘Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints’—all these made up the perfect model of life in earnest.

“*Noah's* was a life of labour for God. He, too, walked with God, and was a preacher of righteousness to a heedless, scoffing world. For 120 years he warned and entreated. With the coming deluge in view, he went about calling on men to repent. He was in earnest for himself and his family when he built the ark. He was in earnest for the world when he continued his preaching of righteousness so long to a disobedient and gainsaying people. Life must have been a solemn thing to him; and the more solemn, the more in earnest.

“*Elijah's* was a life of active labour for God. Coming down from the mountains of Gilead with his hairy mantle wrapt round him, and Jehovah's message on his lips, he stands as the messenger of judgment to Israel in the palace of the king. Then we see him on Carmel, surrounded with the priests of Baal; or alone, when all was over, upon his knees before the Lord, pleading for deliverance to the nation. With another message to the king, he hastens away to Jezreel; then to Horeb, thence from place to place, bearing with him the blessing and the curse as he moves along. Then out of the midst of a busy, harassed, perilous life, he is suddenly snatched away, to be with that God whom he had served so faithfully. What a life of solemnity, elevation, and heavenly fellowship was there! Yet what a life of toil and self-denial; how hard for flesh and blood! His was a life of constant labour; yet he was a man of like passions with ourselves.

“*Paul's* was a life of unwearied labour for God. From the day that he was smitten to the ground by the heavenly brightness on his way to Damascus, to the hour when he finished his course upon a Roman cross, all was labour, sacrifice, and suffering with him. He had no time to lose. Life was too short, and the hand of the persecutor threatened every day to cut it down into a still shorter span. Day and night, by land or sea, in prison or at liberty, in the synagogue or in the Arcopagus, at Jerusalem or at Rome, he preached and toiled, thrusting in his sickle into every field, that he might

have a harvest of many nations as well as of many souls. If familiarity has not made us insensible to its meaning, what would we think of such a passage as this? 'Are they ministers of Christ? I am more. In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times I received forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.'

"*Richard Baxter's* was a life of labour for God. Never was a ministry so laborious, so 'in season and out of season' as his. With zeal that never ebbed, with a love that never cooled, with an energy that never flagged, he pursued his course to the end, in the midst of incessant pain and debility of body. He preached, he wrote, he laboured, he prayed, he watched, as if every moment of the day were worth a lifetime. And yet he thus speaks of himself: 'I confess, to my shame, that I remember no one sin in the world that my conscience doth so much accuse and judge me for, as for doing so little for the saving of men's souls, and dealing no more fervently and earnestly with them for their conversion. I confess, that when I am alone, and think of the case of poor, ignorant, worldly, earthly, unconverted sinners, that live not to God, nor set their hearts on the life to come, my conscience telleth me that I should go to as many of them as I can, and tell them plainly and roundly what will become of them if they do not turn; and beseech them with all the earnestness that I can to come in to Christ, and make no delay. And though I have many excuses, from other business, and from disability and want of time, yet none of them all do satisfy my own conscience. When I consider what heaven and hell are, my conscience telleth me that I should follow them with all earnestness, night and day, and take no nay of them till they return to God.'

"*David Brainerd's* was a life of labour. It was a brief career, but O, how blessed! blessed to himself and to others. His closet-readings, his public labours, his unwearied, self-denied, holy zeal, tell us what manner of man he was. He did much for God in little time, for he was in earnest; and his was an earnestness of peculiar intensity and solemnity.

"*George Whitefield's* was a life of ceaseless labour. From the

day of his conversion to the hour when he rested from his labour all was glowing fervour. His was a more public career than fell the lot of many a minister of Christ; but it was a career of unceasing toil. Save in his voyages across the Atlantic, he had no moment for repose. The world was his field of labour; and he tilled it well. 'I am hunting for souls in these unchristianized wilds!' was the expression he made use of in a letter to a friend, describing the nature of his daily employments. His time was well redeemed—his effort laid out to the best advantage—his fervour poured itself along deep and steady channel. And how rich was his reward!—who thousands called him father! O for thousands of such men in the cold age of ours!

"*Robert M'Cheyne's* was a life of labour. He had but six brief years of ministerial labour, but in that time how much he accomplished! The secret was, that he was in earnest. In his closet he was in earnest, day and night pleading with God. In his study he was in earnest, meditating words for reaching souls, and bringing all his reading to bear on this. In the pulpit he was earnest, affectionately, solemnly, impressively, touchingly earnest, as if he could never have done. In conversation he was in earnest; there was no levity, no folly, about him; he sought to profit, and be profited wheresoever he was. There was earnestness in his words, his looks, his tones. He never trifled. For his eye was on eternity, and that made life a solemn thing, that threw a deep earnestness into all he did. He has left us the pattern of a life in earnest. He has shown us what a life in earnest can do. Truly he was 'like a star, unchanging yet unresting.'" *

John Calvin was a zealous labourer. His body was feeble, and lean, and worn, and spent; but his soul was ever restless and unwearied in his master's service. "Of all things," he said, "an idle life is most irksome to me." He delivered nearly 200 lectures and 300 sermons in the course of a year, besides discharging other duties of daily occurrence. He had no time for sloth, or idle pleasures, or worldly company. Nor did he desist from labouring when on the very point of death; for even then his reply to the entreaties of friends who wished to dissuade him from further exertion was "Shall my Lord come and find me idle?"

John Welsh was a zealous labourer. He gave himself wholly to his work, labouring and praying with untiring assiduity. He preached at least once every day, and prayed the third part of his

* The above quotations are made from the *Presbyterian Review*, of April 1845, with some slight alterations.

ae. In the coldest nights he would rise for prayer, and would be found weeping on the ground, wrestling with the Lord on account of his people. When desired to remit part of his duties, his answer was—"He had his life of God, and therefore it must be spent for him." He wondered how a Christian could lie in bed all night, and not rise to pray.

These are instances of zeal in God's service by *ministers*; and, though not the less instructive on that account, yet to them may be added not a few from other walks of life. *Joseph Williams, John Norton, Thomas Wilson, George Stokes* were all men fully engaged in the active business of the world, and, at the same time, all zealous labourers for God. They were well known and much respected for their diligence and fidelity in the prosecution of their secular vocation, and the labour of their hands was blessed with much success; but they cheerfully consecrated their wealth, and skill, and business talent for the promotion of the cause of religion. They so managed their own affairs that they always had a large surplus of time and money to dedicate to God; and, through their instrumentality, churches, and schools, and even colleges were reared, and youths were educated, and ministers and missionaries supported. These lived not to themselves, but, as one of them expressed, they traded for Christ."

Lady Huntingdon was a zealous labourer. She lived in times when mockery and insult were poured on the servants of God; but she was not ashamed to cast in her lot with these—she made no compromise with the world, and boldly confessed the truth in high places. Through her instrumentality the gospel was introduced into the circles of the gay and licentious, and, from her own lips, many of the sons and daughters of folly were warned, and admonished, and entreated. She dedicated her substance to the erection of churches and support and education of ministers, and renounced the expenses of all state and pomp, that she might have wherewithal to advance the cause of Christ.

Lady Glenorchy was a labourer for God. It is recorded of her, that, after having lived for a season a giddy votary of the world, she was stretched on a bed of sickness, and brought to the gates of death. In this situation the solemn question, "What is man's chief end?" came to her recollection. She remembered the answer given in the *Shorter Catechism*, and was agonized with the thought that she had done nothing to glorify God. Her life was spared. She came forth from the chamber of sickness no more a lover of pleasure, but a lover of God, and firmly determined not again to return to the world's follies, but henceforth to abide under the shadow of the

cross. She kept her resolution; and, in proof of this, consecrated her means, her time, and her influence to God, that she might fulfil the great end of her being.

Harlan Page, though but a humble tradesman, was a zealous labourer. He diligently employed his leisure hours in writing letters in printing and circulating addresses and tracts, in forming meetings for prayer, and establishing and superintending Sabbath-schools. His career was brief, but, at the close of it, at the age of forty-two he had evidence that more than a hundred souls had been converted through his devout and personal instrumentality.

READER, have you laboured with such earnestness as did these? When the books are opened, will it appear that any one soul has ever profited by your example, or influence, or exertions? Have you yet *begun* to labour for God? Have you made diligent search to find out how you can be useful in the world, and whether, in connection with the congregation of which you are a member, the district where you reside, there is not a sphere inviting and demanding the exercise of all your energies, and claiming an interest in your unceasing prayers?

If you have *not* done this, what are your reasons? Do you feel no peculiar responsibility attaching to you as a member of a church of Christ, to co-operate in such a work? And does the awful condition of thousands daily passing from time into eternity without the knowledge of salvation, awaken no concern in your bosom? Are you prepared to meet the demand which, on a death-bed and at the judgment-bar, will be made in reference to the souls of those around you, by denying that *you* are your brother's keeper? Will it avail then to say that you had no time, while the world's business, and the world's pleasures, and the world's company shared largely of your attention? Do you plead in excuse want of talents and opportunities? or do the difficulties and discouragements which may attend such efforts deter you?

Listen, then, whilst we would reason with you upon these excuses:

1. Do you think that it is *not incumbent* upon you, as a *private member* of a congregation, to aid in efforts for the salvation of souls; but that this is a duty which belongs *exclusively to ministers and office-bearers*? If this is your feeling, how are *you* to "glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's?" and what is *your* claim to the name of Christian? Because you hold no *official* situation in the church, have *you* no duties to perform to your brethren of mankind? and is it enough that you have for yourself professed allegiance to Christ, without making one effort to bring others under his dominion? Have you received talents, whether

ny or few, to be employed for God, and yet, in utter negligence your stewardship, do you wrap them in a napkin and fold your hands? Surely Christ's cause ought to engage the heart and secure the services and sacrifices of *all* who bear his name; and the honour of seeking to save souls ought to be as much an object of desire in the humblest as with the most influential of his servants. All that he have is his, and he requires you to serve him with it. He does not permit you to delegate this service to another. He cannot accept of any substitute. It is *your* time, *your* talents, *your* influence, as an *individual* Christian, which he will call you to account for. It is not he who had received only *one* talent, not he who had received *many*, who was condemned for neglecting it. If you consider that it is not within the range of your duty to work for him, what duty do you regard as belonging to you? what sentence do you expect when he shall pronounce your verdict? what recompense can you look for? what crown can you hope to wear? Ministers and elders have, indeed, peculiar duties to discharge, and an awful responsibility connected with them; but it is no part of the office of ministers or elders to relieve private members from duties and obligations which they have bound themselves to perform. The labours of Paul did not supersede those of Aristarchus, Urbane, Dorcas, Aquila, Priscilla, Apphena and Tryphosa, Clement, and others, whose names are in the Book of Life. Do you profess love to God, and yet think it your duty to make no efforts to bring others to love him? Or do you neglect your friends, and relations, and neighbours, and yet think that it belongs not to you to care for their souls? If so, think if the love should be in you which was in Christ Jesus. Or, is it your excuse, that—though admitting your obligation—you are not *competent* for performing such duties; and that, therefore, it is better for you to mind your own affairs, and leave those other matters to others? It may perhaps be true that there are some whose peculiar constitution and circumstances prevent them from engaging in active exertions for others; but until you have the full proof of your abilities for such undertakings, with prayer and patience, you have no right to claim exemption on the ground of incompetency. A little maid was not incompetent to be employed when a mighty captain was to be cured of a loathsome disease; surely the most obscure individual can point a sinner to the Physician in Gilead, and the Physician that is there. Are you, from peculiar circumstances, or by the nature of your occupations, really unfit to visit the poor—to read with them a portion of Scripture—to distribute among them tracts and books—or to make any inquiry into their circumstances? To decline to do this on such a plea as

inability, must be regarded as more the language of sloth, selfishness, and pride, than of modesty. God uses the feeblest instruments often in his service, that his power may be more fully seen, and nothing is required of you but to make use of the opportunities, and employ the means, within your reach. See then that you do not take the plea of incompetency merely to excuse your standing all day idle, when there is work suited to every capacity to be done in the vineyard. A minister in the south of England, while one day exhorting his congregation to labour for God, remarked that the *youngest* could do something. Next morning a little girl of seven years old waited on him, to say that in her neighbourhood there were 200 public-houses open on the Sabbath-day. She thought the minister would write a tract upon the subject, she could distribute it. The tract was written; the child took it round; and the result was, that *ten* public-houses were immediately closed. She did what she could, and God blessed it. Go then, and do likewise.
Or,—

3. Is it because you *cannot spare the time* from your ordinary occupations for such duties, that you are withholding your co-operation? True, the business of your lawful calling must demand a large portion of your time, and in it you are required not to be slothful; but neither are you to be languid in spirit, to be the slave of business, and so occupied with it as to destroy the growth of grace, and shut yourself out from all opportunity of co-operation with those who work for God. Business is a means to an end, but that end is not the securing of *wealth*. What will it profit though you gain the world, if you neglect both your own soul and the souls of others? And after all, is there any one who does not find some time from his ordinary trade or occupation, when he is really desirous of so doing? Ah, think for a moment—Is it really true that you cannot spare *one or two hours* in a week for God's work? Can you declare this honestly? Do you never spend more of your time than this would require in vain and foolish talking, in useless if not sinful amusements, or idle speculations? An American *colporteur*, though poor, and compelled to work hard for the support of his family, yet having been brought from a state of awful wickedness to the enjoyment of salvation, considered himself called to the work of rescuing others. He formed a Sabbath school—collected a library—became a teacher—established prayer-meetings—circulated tracts—and gathered a congregation, to whom he read sermons and other works, till at length so much interest was excited, that he was compelled to apply for a preacher, who on coming found nearly 100 people assembled by the instrumentality of this one man, to hear

gospel. A revival followed—a church was organized—and a poor labourer continued to superintend the Sabbath school for fifteen years, visiting the families, and making it his sole errand to converse on personal religion. The result was, the community where he lived and laboured soon became known as the “green field” of that region, and prayer-meetings were established for miles around. This shows what one *labouring* man can do. See then that the want of time is not an excuse which you would never urge for exemption from any other service, or for denying the enjoyment of any pleasure. If you have no *time* to act for God *now*, you *must* have time to mourn over your not having so acted in eternity. Or,—
 Are you *afraid of the difficulties and discouragements* which you meet with? True, you may expect discouragements in your labours. You may sometimes meet with ingratitude, or incivility, or indifference; you may toil and see no impression made, and no reformation produced. But what of all this? Noah preached righteousness for 120 years, and every nail driven into the ark was a sign of warning; and yet we read not of one soul that was thereby saved. Discouragements are experienced by all who engage in any course of love; but the use to be made of them is only to stimulate to greater exertion and more constant prayer. Duties only are to be done; events are with God. Unbelief quails under opposition; but faith triumphs over it. Success is not the rule for duty. Besides, there may be success when none is known to the instrument of it; and it might encourage sloth, and not be the reward of faith, were it at once to obtain all you ask.

If, then, such reasons as these are all that can be urged against continuing after the salvation of others, consider if they are sufficient when tried by reason and Scripture—or say, do they not all resolve themselves into this, that you have really not that burning love to God and that earnest zeal for souls which you have professed, and that you are not so thoroughly in earnest in working for God as you ought to be?—Can your own soul be prospering if you are living careless about the souls of others?

If, however, after all, you are satisfied that your reasons for withholding your active services are good, you will at least admit that you have no excuse for not making the salvation of the souls around you the *subject of daily prayer*, and for earnestly supplicating assistance on the labours of others who engage in the work. If you do not fight with Joshua in the valley, you cannot refuse to go with Aaron and Hur to the mount, and hold up the hands of Moses? Phylas was labouring mightily for God, even when shut up in prison, because he was fervent in prayer.

We ask you, then, to put your hand to the work, and to come to the help of the Lord against the mighty. Be not any more slothful, but up and doing. The fashion of this world is rapidly passing away. Time will soon merge into Eternity. As yet it is day; but the dark night is approaching. The sky is becoming darker—the clouds are gathering fast. Make haste, prepare to meet thy God. What your hand findeth to do, do it with your might. It is related of a soldier of Mahomet, who had fought all day, and been severely wounded, that at evening his attendants observing him faint, carried him to his tent for repose, and removed his armour, in the belief that he would soon expire. After a little refreshment, however, the veteran instantly sprang to his feet and called for his charger. A friend around dissuaded him, and reminded him of the exploits he had achieved, and the rest he now needed. “Away—away!” said the warrior, pointing his sword to the enemy, “You speak of my exploits, but is the battle won?” then, waving his sword to the skies he exclaimed, “You speak of rest—yes, and I need it; but it awaits me yonder.” So saying, he broke into the field, and perished in the arms of victory! Did this soldier of earth thus strive for a corruptible crown,” and shall not every soldier of heaven surpass him in striving for an incorruptible crown?

Reader! the war between the devil and the Christian still rages. The battle is not yet won. If you are a soldier of Christ you have enlisted during the war, and cannot, therefore, withdraw. Fight on then. Labour now; you will rest in eternity. If a whole congregation, however small their number, were all labouring, striving, praying—O what conquests might be won! Would God long be stranger among such? The Spirit will not come if he is not invited. He will not abide if not welcomed. Christ does no mighty work among us, *because of our unbelief*. It is this that hinders him. It is this that grieves him away. He is willing to bless. He is willing to do mighty works amongst us. Will you, then, be a helper or a hinderer of the work?—a pleader for, or a griever away of both the Saviour and the Spirit?

The Memoirs of the Countess of Huntingdon, Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Fry, and Lady Colquhoun, afford striking examples of active benevolence and devotedness, for the encouragement of those in the higher walks of life;—whilst the Lives of Harlan Page, Thomas Cranfield, Elizabeth Gow, and Sarah Martin, present similar encouragement to those in humble life.

+

