

HIDDEN TREASURES

GOD'S TILLED ACRES

By J. A. Huffman, D.D.

The Bible is a very human book, in that the imagery employed by its inspired writers is such that it brings great and profound spiritual truth within the comprehension of common folk.

There were no big city-dwellers in Old and New Testament days, in the sense in which we would now think of such. Then, as now, in the Near East, the chief occupation pertained to the cultivation of the soil. People lived in the towns and villages, but went to their plots of ground outside, during the day, returning at night. During harvest seasons they would, in some instances, improvise temporary dwellings in the country. But most people knew something about fields and the tilling of them. Then, as now, there were owners of tracts of land—landlords, who had helpers in the tilling of the soil.

The apostle Paul drew upon this imagery when he wrote to the Corinthian church: "Ye are God's husbandry" (1 Cor. 3:9), according to the King James Version. The word "husbandry" is not a very good translation. The Greek word used here is *georgian*, compounded of the little Greek word *ga*, meaning earth or land, and *ergon*, which means work. The word then means tilled or worked field, and the statement literally reads: "Ye are God's tilled field."

There are certain seasons in agriculture, one succeeding another, as all know. There is a time for the plowing of the soil, one for the sowing, one for the watering and cultivating, and still another for the harvesting.

The prophet Jeremiah employed this imagery when he exhorted Israel: "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns" (Jer. 4:3). Jesus spoke of putting the hand to the plow in His exhortation to faithfulness (Luke 9:62).

Paul, in verse six of the same chapter, professes to have planted, in relation to the church at Corinth. He had worked for a period of a year and a half in this wicked and idolatrous city, and had succeeded in planting a church which still needed much care, as his two Epistles to the Corinthians bear evidence. This account is found in Acts 18.

There were others who entered into the labors in God's Corinthian acres. Aquila and Priscilla, husband and wife, Jewish Christians, had assisted Paul, but their labors appear as chiefly in connection with the planting. In verse six, referred to above, Paul says: "Apollos watered." It was Apollos who succeeded Paul as leader of the Corinthian church, and to him there must be accredited an indispensable ministry to this people.

But immediately Paul adds: "But God gave the increase." They were not only God's tilled acres, but, apart from His contribution, all tilling would have been fruitless.

The harvest scene must be brought into view by another passage or two. The Psalmist had said: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:6). Paul also exhorted: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9).

But Paul has something to add to the picture of God's tilled field, with the several workers employed in it. "For we are labourers

together with God." The Greek word for laborers is *sunergoi*, compounded of *ergoi*, which means workers, and *sun*, the little preposition "with." The sentence is so constructed as literally to read: "We are fellow-workers of God." Not only fellow-workers, but fellow-workers who have a part in the employment with God.

Similarly, Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:1 writes of himself and others as "workers together with God," the Greek word being the same as here. Paul's conception of God's tilled field, evidently meaning the church, brings into the picture not only the plowman, the planter, the waterer, uniting them in one great spiritual project, but also God Himself, with whom He makes them fellow laborers. What an honor to be workers together, and with, God!

A ministerial friend of the previous generation was accustomed to classify persons in the work of the church as follows: "Some shirkers, some jerkers, some workers."

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I OUGHT TO PRAY

Samuel Logan Brengle

"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

That little "ought" is emphatic. It implies obligation high as heaven and deep as hell, and is inescapable. Jesus said, "Men ought always to pray," and added, "and not to faint." Men ought to pray. They ought to pray "always," and they ought not to faint or grow fainthearted and cease praying.

A thousand times that text has encouraged me to pray. I confess I do not always feel like praying. There are times when my feelings are numb; when I do not seem to have access to the heavenly Father in prayer; when I find it difficult to pray; and, if I judge by my feelings, there is no one listening to my prayer. Then these words have stirred me to pray. I ought to pray—I ought always to pray—and I should not grow faint in praying.

Prayer is more than saying words. It is the expression of earnest desire. Sometimes I have felt that my desires were not earnest, and then I have searched myself and have realized that while emotionally my desires were not earnest, volitionally they were. In the depths of my being, deeper probably than my emotions, I desired the things for which I was praying.

I have been helped to pray by this assurance: "Your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Paul tells us in Colossians 4:12 that Epaphras labored fervently always in prayer for his brethren, that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

Prayer, then, is a form of work. In my early years I worked, and worked hard, and often went to my work not feeling a bit like working, but I expected results from my work regardless of my feelings. The farmer ploughs his fields often when he does not feel like it, but he confidently expects a crop from his labors, and he realizes that he ought to plough his fields. Now if prayer is a form of work and our labor is not in vain in the Lord, then we ought to pray regardless of our feelings.

If we can pray fervently with warm emotions, all the better; but if we cannot, we should still pray and not grow fainthearted.

Recently when I knelt for morning prayers I felt a sort of deadness in my soul—no fervor, no access in prayer—and just then the "accuser of the brethren" became very busy; he reminded me of things that had long since been under the blood, and shot fiery darts at

me. I could only cry to God for help. Then the blessed Comforter reminded me that the blood had long since covered my sins and washed me clean from their guilt and pollution, and reminded me that I must not cast away my confidence—that my great High Priest was pleading my case, and that I must come boldly to the throne of grace. This I did, and the enemy was routed. My emotions were liberated, my spirit was free, and, oh, what a blessed time of communion I had with my Lord! I found prayer easy. If I had fainted instead of fighting the good fight of faith, the battle would have been lost, gloom would have settled upon me like a thick cloud and enshrouded my soul, and I could not have reaped because I had not sown; I could not have received wages because I had not labored fervently in prayer.

William Bramwell, an early Methodist preacher whose ministry was mightily used and who was mighty in prayer, said that he never went to secret prayer without reluctance, with feet that dragged, with a spirit that drooped; but as he labored in prayer his spirit revived, and he found it oftentimes difficult to cease praying, and his feet became like hind's feet. Let us pray!

A MINISTER'S SUCCESS

A certain minister of the gospel occupied a high place in a large city. He came from a small Canadian town. One who knew him well was asked: "How did he secure that prominent pulpit? What is the secret of his success? There are greater preachers than he—more scholarly and more eloquent."

The answer was: "He has always done what many other men knew ought to be done, but neglected. He never failed to write notes of condolence to the afflicted, whether they belonged to his congregation or not. He would cross the street to speak to a burdened man. He would pen a sincere word of praise to the sheriff who did his duty; to the mayor who enforced the law; to the teacher in the public school who was faithful. Nothing that might properly receive a minister's notice escaped him. This is the real secret of his success."

—Selected.

THE COMING BOY AND GIRL

There's a place for you in the world,
my boy,
A corner for you to fill;
And it waits today, along life's way
For a boy with a frank "I will."
So lad be true, the world wants you
In the corner that you may fill.

There's a place for you in the world,
my girl,
A corner for you to fill;
And a work to do, that no one but you
In God's great plan can fill.
So dear, be true, the world wants you;
And your place is waiting still.

—Hazel Davenport.

OBITUARY

F. H. Locke, formerly of Amherst, N. S., died recently at Victoria, B. C., after some weeks of illness. We learned of Brother Locke's death just before publication of this Highway and are only able to inform our readers of his passing. A more complete obituary notice will be published in our next Highway.

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