

THE



“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)

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LOW EXPECTATIONS

When we expect minimum results, that is often what we get. When we talk about our environment, our influences, the situations we're in, and who and what surrounds us, we tend to focus on cautioning about the overtly bad influences and how they can slowly lead us astray. Although these warnings about negative influences are important for keeping a low tolerance for sin in our surroundings, how much thought do we put into the positive influences? Do we surround ourselves with situations and people to bring out the best in us? Challenges to learn and grow make us stronger in our knowledge and application of God's Word. We shouldn't have to search far to find

THE HARVESTER

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those who will hold us to high expectations. We have a natural environment full of those who should hold us to high standards: the congregation. Do we hold each other to high standards so as to encourage growth?

We typically meet the expectations of our environment, or at least we aspire to meet them. We have several environments with which we interact and are expected to meet a certain standard of behavior or results. Whether it's a jobsite, a classroom, or a family household, there's a certain standard that particular company, teacher, or family has. These standards may be expectations regarding cleanliness, quality, safety, or many more things. In other words we're well accustomed to having a "this is the way we do things here." There are things we simply don't do because it's never been expected of us, but we quickly learn to do them once it becomes the standard. We see this as young children grow. A young kid may walk in a house, take off their shoes, and leave them in the middle of the room. Those shoes will stay there unless they know it's expected of them to pick them up and put them in their appropriate place.

At its worst when we're in places and around people who have few expectations for us, we'll tend to give our minimum because it doesn't really matter. Now, do we find ourselves doing that as Christians? Do we find ourselves giving the minimum during services? I recently caught myself doing this, not trying my best at something. Then I began to wonder if anyone would notice. Further, if they did notice, would anyone tell me I wasn't meeting expectations and that I'm capable of doing better? I'm blessed with the opportunity to speak at multiple congregations, and I don't doubt that multiple members of any congregation would tell me if I said something unscriptural from the pulpit. However, would anyone say anything if it seemed like I didn't give my best effort? Would anyone confront me if I just "mailed it in," went through the motions, and checked the boxes? Are we doing our best, or are we doing our routine?

The point is that we should have high expectations for one another as Christians, both in the services and in the daily walks of life. Holding each other to meet a high standard challenges us and encourages our growth. Many also find it's easy to slip into a comfortable pattern, as I have been guilty of doing. Then, our service to God becomes not much more than a choreographed series of rehearsed sayings and movements. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was to offer us a path to freedom from the limitations and shortcomings that are inherent in the written law (see Romans 7). He routinely noted that the Pharisees had fallen into such a faulty subservience to the law instead of serving the Creator of the law. Low expectations and subsequently falling into routines pave the dangerous road to complacency, and there are several warnings against this.

Paul wrote directly to the congregation in Corinth concerning a need to hold a high standard for one another. A perverse situation had arisen with one of the members, a situation so scandalous that the surrounding unbelieving Gentiles would not even accept it (1 Cor. 5:1). Paul tells the congregation that they cannot put up with this member while he knowingly lives in ongoing sin so publicly and openly. Do note there's an important distinction to be made between one who has sinned in the past and repented as opposed to one who is continually living in known sin without remorse. Paul is commenting on an individual in Corinth who clearly falls into the latter category. Paul notes the importance of monitoring us and our congregation with all sin:

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. (1 Cor. 5:11)

Paul's ultimate point is the congregation - its members - are responsible for holding each other to a standard: God's standard.

For what have I to do to judge them also that are without?

do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (1 Cor. 5:12-13)

As such, the members of our congregations are those who can encourage our growth through positive expectations for one another or contribute to complacency through low expectations.

How do we become complacent and begin having bare minimum expectations for ourselves and our congregation? Moses repeatedly warned about arriving at this attitude, and that success can lead to cessation of fearing God and believing prosperity is a birthright. In Deuteronomy 4, Moses summarized what the children of Israel had been through up to the point before entering the Promised Land. He reminded them of the punishment that followed when they fell into idolatry and failed to trust in God, and he contrasted that with the success for when they correctly followed God. Then, he warned of getting too comfortable in the future:

When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. (Deu. 4:25-26)

Similarly in chapter 8, Moses once more warns of what happens when the standards stop being upheld as the comfort and prosperity increases:

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Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.
(Deu. 8:12-18)

Moses' warnings ring true today, especially for those of us in the United States. It's obvious that we are a generation who has come to expect comfort. We don't have to search far to find those who think prosperity is a birthright rather than earned. Unfortunately, such an attitude may be in the Church's present generation, and we've slipped into low expectations and complacency in many regards. Many of the doctrinal battles have been "fought" and studied by the generations before us; we take the knowledge and lessons learned from these past battles for granted now. In this country we're fairly familiar with the State of the Union address. The letters to the congregations in Revelation 2 and 3 read much like a State of the Congregation address. Which letter would apply to us? Ask this of yourself and your congregation, what is the state of our congregations today? To me, it seems as if we're Laodiceans riding a wave of spiritual prosperity set by generations of Ephesians before us, but that wave will become a

trickle if we lower our standards.

This isn't to say responsibility for high standards are solely upon the shoulders of those surrounding us in our homes, congregations or elsewhere. We have an individual responsibility to meet God's standard. Our environments will certainly influence us, and if we're not challenged to grow, we may very well become stagnant. We are to have high expectations for one another out of love, encouraging each other to grow more and more. Among the most important standard we need to make sure we're meeting is the same standard we want to spread to others. It's the one Joshua proclaimed as the standard for his household: "...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Jos. 24:15).

BEN

TEN LESSONS LEARNED FROM NOAH

1. **Do not miss the boat!** Consider the five foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. God did not give a certain deadline. Don't become so engrossed in today that we fail to be prepared for tomorrow.

2. **Remember that we are all in the same boat. Don't rock it.** In failing to consider and assist others with their needs, we may find ourselves in trouble. "*Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*" (Gal. 6:2).

Jonah "rocked the boat" and he was cast out! We, too, could lose our effectiveness, and even our place in the boat, through strife and discontent.

3. **Plan ahead.** It was not raining when Noah built the ark. Neither did God provide for a life-boat. Jesus stressed the importance of planning ahead in Luke 14:28-35.

4. **Remain alert.** Noah was six hundred years old when he was called by God to do something really big. Abraham was one hundred when God finally fulfilled His promise to provide the appointed successor. Moses was eighty when God called him, and he then was allowed forty years of faithful service.

Paul was a young man, but he recognized his opportunity and responsibility when called.

5. Do not listen to critics; just attend to the job that needs to be done.

...there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. (2 Pet. 3:3-4)

We are often criticized for our conservative, fundamental approach to serving God. But carefully notice the next two verses:

For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. (2 Pet. 3:5-6)

6. Travel in pairs. Jesus sent out His disciples two by two (Luke 10:1).

7. Being in a hurry is not always an advantage. Snails were on board along with the cheetahs. Remember the famous story about the hare and the tortoise.

8. When you are distressed, float for a while.

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (Jas. 1:2-4)

In your patience possess ye your souls. (Luke 21:19)

9. Do not feel inadequate. The ark was built by amateurs, the Titanic by professionals. Which would you have preferred to be aboard?

I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content, I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Php. 4:11-13)

10. Do not be overwhelmed by the storm. On one occasion Jesus calmed the raging sea (Mark 4:37-41). During another storm Jesus came walking on the water (Mat. 14:22-33). But Peter was overwhelmed.

Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them. (Psa. 89:9)

As in the days of Noah following the flood, with God there is always a rainbow beyond the storm.

Adapted from a sermon by HARRY COBB
(Deceased)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What did the earth look like in the beginning?
2. What affliction did Hannah suffer from, that allowed Peninnah to provoke her?
3. What did the sailors of the ship Jonah was on do to increase their chances of survival?
4. Complete the saying of Jesus: *“for the tree is known by his _____”*
5. When Jesus went to dinner at Simon the Pharisee’s house, what did a woman do for him?

...ANSWERS NEXT MONTH

And remember last month’s questions?

1. On what were the Ten Commandments written?
TWO TABLES OF STONE (Deu. 5:22)
2. What relationship was Ruth to Naomi?
DAUGHTER-IN-LAW (Ruth 1:4)
3. What did Jesus do to each of the disciples during the Last Supper? WASHED THEIR FEET (John 13:1-5)
4. At Christ’s crucifixion what did the soldiers place on his head? CROWN OF THORNS (Mat. 27:29)
5. Who wrote the letter to Philemon? PAUL (Phm. 1:1)