

The Laws of Spiritual Work

by John A. Broadus

Spiritual work is refreshing to soul and body, links workers in unity, and has rich rewards, including success and the Lord's commendation and welcome.

Scripture: Proverbs 11:25, Ecclesiastes 3:1, Matthew 25:21, John 4:32, 1 Corinthians 3:6, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Galatians 6:9, Colossians 3:23, Hebrews 6:10

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Kingdom Work"

Description

John A. Broadus preaches on the importance of spiritual work, using the analogy of sowing and reaping to highlight key principles. He emphasizes that spiritual work refreshes the soul and body, urging believers to love and engage in religious work to experience its rejuvenating effects. Broadus also discusses the seasons of sowing and reaping in the spiritual sphere, emphasizing the need for continuous spiritual advancement and the periodicity that governs human nature. Furthermore, he underscores how spiritual work unites workers in a common purpose, linking them to the past, present, and future laborers in God's kingdom. Lastly, Broadus highlights the rich rewards of spiritual work, including the satisfaction of success, the eternal impact of one's efforts, and the commendation and welcome from the Lord of the harvest.

Transcript

"But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not. The disciples therefore said one to another, Hath any man brought him aught to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work. Say not ye. There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? Behold, I say unto you. Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest. He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. For herein is the saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye have not labored: others have labored, and ye are entered into their labor". John 4:32-38

The disciples must have been very much astonished at the change which they observed in the Master's appearance. They left him, when they went away to a neighboring city to buy food, reclining beside Jacob's well, quite worn out with the fatigue of their journey, following upon the fatigues of long spiritual labors. And here now he is sitting up, his face animated, his eyes kindled. He has been at work again. Presently they ask him to partake of the food which they had brought, and his answer surprised them: "I

have food to eat that ye know not." They looked around, and saw nobody; the woman to whom he had been speaking was gone, and they said, "Has any one brought him something to eat?" Jesus answered, "My food is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work," And then, with this thought of work, he changes the image to sowing and reaping, and bids them go forth to work.

Now, from this passage with its images, I have wished to discourse upon some laws of spiritual work, as here set forth. For we are beginning to see, in our time, that there are laws in the spiritual sphere as truly as in the mental and in the physical spheres. what are the laws of spiritual work which the Saviour here indicates? I name four.

I. Spiritual work is refreshing to soul and body. "My food is," said the tired, hungry one, who had aroused himself, "to do the will of Him that sent me, and to accomplish his work."

We all know the power of the body over the mind, and we all know, I trust, the power of The mind over the body; how any animating theme can kindle the mind until the wearied body will be stirred to new activities; until the man will forget that he was tired, because of that in which he is interested. But it must be something that does deeply Interest the mind. So there is suggested to us the thought that we should learn to love spiritual work. If we love spiritual work it will kindle our souls; it will even give health and vigor to our bodies. There are some well-meaning, but good-for-nothing, professed Christians in our time, who would have better health of mind and even better health of body, if they would do more religious work and be good for something in their day and generation.

How shall we learn to love religious work so that it may kindle and refresh us? Old Daniel Sharp, who was a famous Baptist minister in Boston years ago, used to be very fond of repeating, "The only way to learn to preach is to preach." Certainly, the only way to learn to do anything is to do the thing. The only way to learn to love spiritual work is to keep doing it until we gain pleasure from the doing; until we discern rewards in connection with the doing; and to cherish all the sentiments which will awaken in us that "enthusiasm of humanity" which it was Jesus that introduced among men; and to love the souls of our fellow men, to love the wandering, misguided lives, to love the suffering and sinning all around us with such an impassioned love that it shall be a delight to us to do them good and to try to save them from death. Then that will refresh both mind and body.

II. There are seasons in the spiritual sphere-sowing seasons and reaping seasons, just as there are in farming. "Say not ye," said Jesus, "There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest?"-that is to say, it was four months from that time till the harvest. They sowed their wheat in December; they began to reap it in April. "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."

In the spiritual sphere it was a harvest time then, and they were bidden to go forth and reap the harvest that waved white and perishing. We can see, as we look back, that the ends of all the ages had now come to that time; that the long course of providential preparation, dimly outlined in the Old Testament, had led to the state of Things that then prevailed; that the fullness of the times had come, when God sent forth his Son to teach men and to atone for men, and to rise again and come forth as their Saviour, and that his servants should go forth in his name. And the like has been true in many other seasons of Christianity; there have been great reaping times, when men have harvested the fruits which come from the seed scattered by others long before.

This principle is true In individual churches, that there are seasons of sowing and reaping. It has to be so. We sometimes say we do not believe in the revival idea; we think there ought to be revival in the church all the time. If you mean that we ought always to be seeking for spiritual fruits, always aiming at spiritual advancement, it is true. But if you mean that you expect that piety will go on with even current in the church, that there will be just as much sowing and reaping at any one time as at any other, then you will certainly be disappointed. That is not the law of human nature. That is not possible in the world. Periodicity pervades the universe. Periodicity controls the life of all individuals, shows itself in the operations of our minds. Periodicity necessarily appears in the spiritual sphere also. People have Their ups and downs. They ought to strive against falling low. They ought not to be content with growing cold. They ought to seek to maintain good health of body all the while, but it will not be always equally good; and good health of mind and soul all the time, but it 'will not be always equally good. They ought to be seeking to reap a harvest of spiritual good among those around the mall the while; but they will have seasons which are rather of sowing, and other seasons which will be rather of reaping.

Oh! do you want to see a great season of harvest among your own congregation? And do you not know, brethren, as well as the preacher can tell you, what is necessary in order that you may see it? what are the conditions but deepened spiritual life in your own individual souls, stronger spiritual examples set forth in your lives, more earnest spirituality in your homes, a truer standard in your business and social relations to mankind, more of heartfelt prayer of God's blessing, and more untiring and patient and persevering effort, in season and out of season, to bring others to seek their salvation?

III. Spiritual work links the workers in unity. "Herein is the saying true, "said Jesus; "One soweth, and another reapeth. Other men have labored, and ye are entered into their labors."

The prophets centuries before had been preparing for that day, and the forerunner had been preparing for that day, and the labors of Jesus himself in his early ministry had been preparing the way, and now the disciples could look around them upon fields where, from the sowing of others, there were opportunities for them to reap. "Other men have labored, and ye are entered into their labors. One soweth, and another reapeth." That is the law everywhere; it is true of all the higher work of humanity-"One soweth, and another reapeth"; and our labors link us into unity. It is true of human knowledge. How little has any one individual of mankind been able to find out beyond what the world has known before! Even the great minds that stand like mountain peaks as we look back over the history of human thought, when we come to look into it, do really but uplift the thought that is all around them; else they themselves could not have risen.

It is true in practical inventions. We pride ourselves on the fact that ours is an age of such wonderful practical inventions; we some-times persuade ourselves that we must be the most intelligent generation of mankind that ever lived, past all comparison; that no other race, no other century, has such wonderful things to boast of. How much of it do we owe to the men of the past! Every practical invention of today has been rendered possible by what seemed to us the feeble attainments of other centuries, by the patient investigation of the men who, in many cases, have passed away and been forgotten. We stand upon the shoulders of the past, and rejoice in our possessions, and boast; and when we grow conceited and proud of it, we are like a little boy lifted by his father's supporting arms, and standing on his father's shoulders, and clapping his hands above his father's head, and saying, in childish glee, "I am taller Than papa" A childish conclusion, to be sure.

We stand upon the shoulders of the past, and thereby we are lifted up in all the higher work of mankind; and we ought to be grateful to the past, and mindful of our duty to the future; for the time will come when men "will look back upon our inventions, our slow travel, our wonderful ignorance of the power of physical forces and the adaptations of them to physical advancement, and smile at the childishness with which, in the end of the nineteenth century, we boasted of ourselves and our time.

And now it is not strange that this same thing should be true of spiritual work. When you undertake to do some good in a great city' like this, you might sit down and say. "What can I do with all this mass of vice and sin?" But you do not have to work alone. You can associate yourself with other workers, in a church, with various organizations of workers, and thereby reenforce your own exertions; you can feel that you are a part of a mighty force of workers, of your own name and other Christian names. Grace be with all them that love our lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and are trying to do good in his name! And it will cheer our hearts to remember that wide over the land and over the world are unnumbered minions of workers of the army to which we belong. They tell us that be International Sunday School Lessons which most of us study every Sunday are actually studied now every Lord's day by at least ten millions of people, all studying on the same day the same portion of the Bible. That is but one fact to remind us that we are members of a great spiritual host, doing a great work in the world.

And not merely are there many contemporaries with whom we are linked in unity, but we are in unity with the past; other men have labored and we have entered into their labors. All the good that all the devout women and all the zealous men of past ages have been doing has come down to us, opening the way for us to do good. And not merely with the past, but we are linked with the laborers of the future. They may hear our names or they may hear them not. We may perish from all memory of mankind, but our work will not ever, and if we are engaged in the Lord's work, we link ourselves to his permanency and his almightiness, and our work will go down to help the men who are to come after.

The same thing is true here, also, in the individual church; one soweth and another reapeth. A pastor seldom gathers half as much fruit from the seed of his own sowing as he gathers from the seed that others have sown. And there will come some man here-God grant it may be soon, and wisely, and well-who will gather seed from the sowing of the venerable pastor so well and worthily beloved in years ago, seed from the sowing of the energetic pastor of recent years, and O my soul, he may gather some harvest, even from the seed scattered in the brief fleeting interim of this summer. We put all our work together. We sink our work in the one great common work. We scatter seed for God and for souls, and we leave it to God's own' care and blessing. One soweth, and another reapeth.

My brethren, there is nothing like Christianity to individualize mankind. It was Christianity that taught us to appreciate the individuality of men: "Every man must give account of himself unto God." Men were no longer to lose themselves in the state, as classical antiquity taught them to do, but to stand out in their separate personality and individual responsibility' and individual rights and duties. But at the same time much of what we can do that is best in the world we must do by close connection and interaction one with another. Let us rejoice to act through others.

Priscilla and Aquila! What a power they were for early Christianity when they took that eloquent young Alexandrian Apollos and taught him in private the way of God more perfectly! Priscilla, that devout woman, stood, in fact, before delighted assemblies in Corinth and spoke to them the perfect way of God through the eloquent man whom she had taught. And how often does the Sunday school teacher, who labored long and, as the world might have thought, fruitlessly, with her little naughty boys and girls, become in

future times a great power for good in the world through one or other of them! The teacher has to sink himself in his pupils: never mind if he sinks all out of the world's sight, provided he can make his mark upon them and prepare them for greater usefulness, and put into them some good spirit, and send them forth to do the work which to him personally is denied.

Here lies the great power of Christian women. There is much they can do personally, with their own voice and their own action, but there is more they can do by that wondrous influence which men vainly strive to depict, that influence over son and brother and husband and friend whereby all the strength and power of the man is softened and guided and sobered and made wiser through the blessed influence of the woman.

God be thanked that we can not only do good in our individual efforts, but we can do good through others! Let us cultivate this, let us delight in this, that we can labor through others. Whenever your pastor may stand before the gathered assembly he can speak with more power because of you, if you do your duty to him and through him.

IV. Spiritual work has rich rewards. "And he that reapeth receiveth wages," saith Jesus, "and gathereth fruit unto life eternal."

Spiritual work has rich rewards. It has the reward of success. It is not in vain to try to do good to the souls of men through the truth of God and seeking his grace. Sometimes you may feel as if you were standing at the foot of a precipice a thousand feet high and trying to spring to its summit, and were all powerless. Sometimes you may feel as if you had flung your words against a stone wall and made no impression at all. Sometimes you may go away all ashamed of what you have said in public or in private. But there was never a word spoken that uttered God's truth and sought God's blessing, that was spoken in vain. Somehow it does good to somebody, it does good at some time or other; it shall be known in earth or in heaven that it did do good. Comfort your hearts with these words: It is not in vain to try to do good.

You may say, "I have not the lips of the eloquent, the tongue of the learned, how can I talk?" There is many a minister who is eloquent and has preached to gathered congregations, who could tell you that he knows of many more instances in which his private words have been blest to individuals than he knows of such instances in public. I knew of a girl who had been so afflicted that she could not leave her couch for years, who had to be lifted constantly-poor, helpless creature!-but who would talk to those who came into her room about her joy in God, and would persuade them to seek the consolations of the Gospel, and many were benefited and would bring their friends to her, till after a while they brought them from adjoining counties, that she, the poor, helpless girl, might influence them; at length she even began to write letters to people far away, and that girl's sickbed became a center of blessing to people throughout a whole region.

We talk about doing nothing in the world. Ah, if our hearts were in it! we do not know what we can do. That tiger in the cage has been there since he was a baby tiger, and does not know that he could burst those bars if he were but to exert his strength. Oh, the untried strength in all our churches, and the good that the people could do if we would only try, and keep trying, and pray for God's blessing. My friends, you cannot save your soul as a solitary, and you ought not to dare to try to go alone into the paradise of God. We shall best promote our own piety when we are trying to save others, We shall be most helpful to ourselves when we are most helpful to those around us. Many of you have found it so; and all of you may find it so, again and again, with repetitions that shall pass all human telling. "For he That watereth shall be watered also again."

Spiritual work shall also be rewarded in the Lord of the harvest's commendation and welcome. Ah, he will know which was the sowing and which was the reaping. The world may not know; we may never hear; but he will know which was the sowing and which was the reaping, and who tried to do good and thought he had not done it, and who was sad and bowed down with the thought of being utterly unable to be useful, and yet was useful. He will know, he will reward even the desire of the heart, which there was no opportunity to carry out. He will reward the emotion that trembled on the lip and could find no utterance. He will reward David for wanting to build the temple as well as Solomon for building it. He will reward all that we do, and all that we try to do, and all that we wish to do. O blessed God! he will be your reward and mine, forever and forever.

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