



Stewardship Season: Talents

Doing Our Best

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Dr George Whyte, Clerk to Edinburgh Presbytery, for his thoughts on the stewardship of talents.

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1 Kings 7: 13-22

In church, one of the common complaints of the over-stretched volunteer or the over-wrought minister is that what is done is not fully appreciated. Indeed, worse than that it is never even noticed.

Being taken for granted is not nice – it's always more pleasant when people say thanks. Becoming invisible can be unsettling. You have gone to great lengths to plan the service, organise the event, turn out the newsletter, decorate the sanctuary and it seems people think it happens automatically.

Then, as we dwell on the ingratitude of others, morale sags. We start to think, "Why bother?"

So the zealous might just slip back into the ranks of the lukewarm. If nobody is looking at the service I give why break my neck? Just do the minimum. Get by. The best takes more effort but nobody is looking for that. Why bother chasing after excellence when mediocrity seems enough? Save time and energy which can be used where they might be appreciated. Or worse we get bitter over the wasted hours, the sleepless night. Bitterness leads to division. We draw lines between those of us who go the extra mile, give the shirt off our back only to find that the common five eighths don't care. The inner (hard?) core is defined by their effort-making while the flabby outliers just take without so much as a thought never mind a thanks. Them and us. The triers and the takers. The worker and the slacker.

In 1 Kings 7: 13-22 we read part of the description of how Solomon built his temple. Solomon, of course, is best remembered for his wisdom – in chapter 3 verse 12 God says to Solomon, "I will give you a wise and discerning mind". The temple in Jerusalem – of which the Wailing Wall is the last remaining trace – was the product of that mind. Perhaps this little-read bible passage has something to say to us as we look at how we use our talents in the service of the same God who blessed Solomon all those years ago.

In the section we read the focus is on the making of pillars. Solomon has called in a specialist. He is Hiram from Tyre who is a worker in bronze. Then we are told in some detail about how Hiram made the pillars. It ends in verse 22 with the statement "And upon the tops of the pillars was lily-work." The pillars according to the record were well over 30ft high. In a building lit with oil lamps these vast bronze columns would have soared into the gloom far above the heads of the worshippers.



Hiram who made them and Solomon who commissioned them would have known that. They would have understood that the congregation would be focused on the altar. Or they were jostling, elbowing their way through. Who had eyes for the very top of the pillar? The crowd would be chatting or singing, holding tight to their sacrificial animal on the way in, stepping out gladly as they left. Few would care about the “chequer work” or the “cast nets” or the “double row of bronze pomegranates” which Hiram made. Even if they did they would have had to get their eyes past these ornamentations to catch sight, way up in the shadows and the smoke, the “lily-work” over which the craftsman had taken so much trouble.

Hiram, the worker in bronze, went to such lengths not because the lily-work would earn him compliments but because he was striving to do his best in the house of his God. He had learned his craft from a young age and when the chance came to make something for the Temple he was going to give the task the very best that he could offer. Even if no one ever looked up and noticed the marvellous detailing he would know that upon the tops of the pillars there was lily-work. He would go back to Tyre content in the knowledge that he had stretched his talents, pushed his craftsmanship. He had done his best – that was enough.

Most of us will not be asked to cast pillars for the new cathedral. Our abilities lie elsewhere and what we make or do may be less enduring than bronze. But whatever our commission, there is an encouragement here to give it our best shot even if no-one else notices. Perhaps particularly if no-one else notices – sometimes one of the signs of excellence is that all the arrangements have gone smoothly or everything looked just right.

Hiram, worker of bronze, encourages me to do my best – even if what I produce is hidden and out of the way. The satisfaction is that I know I have done what I could when the chance to serve came my way.

I don't need thanks to top off my lily-work – it's enough to know that I put it there.



Prayers

Call to Worship

Live lives worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory

1 Thessalonians 2: 1-12

Call to Prayer

Stand firm and immovable, and work for the Lord always, work without limit, since you know that in the Lord your labour cannot be lost.

1 Corinthians 15: 58

Prayer 1

O God, who looked at your creation and called it good,
we gather here as people blessed by your gifts.

By love we have been made in your image,
we are glad to be placed in this display of your handiwork.

We confess our sins.

We are not always grateful for what we have received.

We misuse the earth's plenty.

We consume more than we need.

We take from future generations the resources which are rightly theirs.

We do not always show your face to the world.

Instead our neighbours see brows raised in anger, lips curled with a sneer, eyes which look away from those who want our help.

Loving God, forgive us. Remake from wounded souls signs of your grace that in the days which lie ahead we may, unburdened by the past, serve the cause of the kingdom.

For we ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Prayer 2

Generous God, you have lavished every gift upon us.

We bring our thanks for the loveliness and ingenuity of your creation.

We see your thoughtfulness in the turning seasons, in the endless variety of nature, in the astonishing creativity of humankind.

In your amazing generosity, you did not even spare your own son in your search for those who had wandered away.

In gratitude for blessings great and small we bring this offering of money and the promise of service yet to be given.

We pray for the world in all its glory and need.

We are challenged at every turn as new discoveries raise fresh questions.

We ask, as Solomon did, for the wisdom to know right from wrong so that there may be justice for every child of God.

We are dismayed by same failing old failings as greed and prejudice bring conflict destruction.

May we be restless in the search for peace –
peace in our circles of family and friendship,
peace in our land and peace between the nations.

We know that the Church is not as you would have her be.

Call us again to follow her Master that we may stride out to be by his side.

Around us are people who stretch our patience, undermine our uncertainties, disturb our rest.

Fill us with the grace which seeks the best, the faith which persists in the search and the spirit which equips us for the challenge of today.

Eternal God, in other times you called men and women to be the best that they could be.

We give thanks for the ways in which their example inspires us to follow that most excellent way.

Keep us true in our service until we join with all the saints in that place of unending praise.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us when we pray to say:-

Our Father,...



Musical suggestions

CH4 198	Let us build a house
CH4 497	Almighty Father of all things that be
CH4 498	Angel voices ever singing
CH4 500	Lord of creation
CH4 504	Two little fishes
CH4 505	All that I am
CH4 517	Fight the good fight
CH4 529	Forth in thy name
CH4 543	Longing for light, we wait in darkness



Additional Resources

Pray Now is designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers.

Word of Life is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



SPIRITUALITY OF CONFLICT

The [Spirituality of Conflict](#) website publishes reflections on the Sunday gospel readings in the 3-year lectionary cycle of the church. The reflections explore the themes of conflict within the gospels and offer questions and commentary for private reading, group discussions and public worship. Whilst most of the content will be connected to the

Revised Common Lectionary, some will relate to occasions throughout the year – everything from St Patrick's Day to World AIDS Day. All of the content is free to download, use and share with others.

[Quick Guides](#) are designed to help people with the various elements of leading worship, gathering community and ordering space.

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading

Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)

Quick Guide...



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday archive material and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#).

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Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

