

In this episode, we're going to talk about one of the most underrated facets of true Biblical success of a Christian life. And a major reason it's underrated is because it's not truly universally valued. But the reality is, the most effective Christianity operates in this framework...and, frankly, *worldly* Christianity doesn't.

So, you say, what in the world are you talking about? Here's the phrase that we all should seal in our hearts and minds: *God's genius is that we labor in obscurity.* Does that startle you? Well, here's the first truth about that: we should never automatically correlate obscurity with irrelevance or ineffectiveness. But, frankly, a persevering willingness to labor in obscurity doesn't line up with the mindset of many folks, especially some of those who consider themselves achievers. But why would that be?

Here's the thing. God's integrated, fruitful playbook is that He uses our labors done in obscurity. So, you want to think about *obscurity*? How about Noah being ridiculed for his weird notion about an ark? He labored in laugh-inducing obscurity for many years. How about Abraham first being called out of his family...his home...his land to a decades-long laboring in obscurity? How about the boy David tending the flocks in obscurity, so forgotten *that his own father didn't think of him* when Samuel asked Jesse to see all his sons? How about solitary callings of the prophets of the Old Testament? How about John the Baptist, so obscure *in his mature mindset* that he questioned Jesus as to why He chose to come to him?

How about Mary? An obscure person, *literally* laboring in obscurity, delivering the Savior of us all! Bethlehem? Obscure place. Jesus the infant born in a manger? An "obscure" person in the flesh in an obscure place...no thronging crowds were gathered. Jesus the Rabbi who never went to Rome...or for that matter traveled more than a handful of miles from His birthplace? Yes, Jesus Himself laboring in obscurity in the context of the vast, bustling importance of a roaring Roman empire. And how about several of those fishermen laboring each day in obscurity, then called to Apostleship and in turn working in obscurity for the Kingdom within the Roman empire? Yeah, ultimately martyred ingloriously in front of meager crowds. Each of these people...these places...these vocations were obscure, almost invisible in the world's eyes.

But...of course...God's economy has always operated on a completely different basis than the kingdoms of this world. For sure, the running rules of the world are well-established: one must climb the ladder. One must become known. One must be an influencer. Fame is a paramount accomplishment. Fortune is a paramount measure. That's human progress. That's how great nations happen. Yes, great empires, too.

But here's the deal. The book of Daniel tells us about the great empires: the Babylonian Empire...the Medo-Persian Empire...the Greek Empire...the Roman Empire...and, of course, the Israelite Empire. Whoa, you say, there was no great "Israelite empire"...and, of course, you are right! In fact, at different times, God deliberately allowed both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah...God's own people...to be subsumed into worldly empires! That's a very important lesson about God's ways!

In fact, if it weren't for God's specific plans for His people to be remembered for entirely different purposes—with Israel being perfectly documented in the Bible—what are the chances of anybody ever even hearing of Saul and David and Solomon—bluntly, these guys were clearly considered quite unimportant on the world stage of history as compared to Alexander the Great and the Caesars of Rome!

But here's the important key: even when God was working through the relatively-smaller Kingdom of Israel, the kings didn't have a persevering humble mindset. They let their pride swell at key times. Like Saul losing his king's throne from God because of his presuming to function as priest of Israel...his kingship alone was "insufficient" for Saul. Like David's privilege-laced affair with Bathsheba and his taking the life of her husband Uriah. Like the unwisdom of Solomon in using his wide-ranging power to treat his citizens like slaves, ultimately leading to a revolt and the splitting of the nation of Israel itself (see 1 Kings 12:1-20). The big-picture contrasts are clear: God's way is *laboring in obscurity*, and if that not in reality, *then needfully in mindset*. The truth is, it's the pride that so easily creeps in that's the true obstacle to God's greatness manifesting through us. That's true with Lucifer who became Satan, true with Adam and Eve, and true with us.

Just sit back for a minute and think of the so-called Holy Roman Empire in Europe for ten centuries. It was supposedly Holy, supposedly Roman, and supposedly Empire—but, in reality, it was none of those three. In contrast, the clear breakdown in the Bible is really just two: the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God we find in Colossians 1. Yeah, born-again believers in Christ by grace in faith are citizens of the Kingdom of God the moment they believe. And here's the really interesting thing: God disciplines all of his Kingdom citizens such that they most always labor in obscurity, in the dailyness of the living out the faith, being directed by the Lord Himself. That's *exactly* where the *vast bulk* of the work of God is done! Colossians 3:17 (ESV) says it so well: "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." *That's right—whatever we do!*

And that contrast is especially noticeable in the context of all human history. Can you personally name any one person who lived during the 3rd century? How about naming someone from the 12th century? Think of the deficient church leaders and leading merchants and powerful kings...the truth is, all that power, fame, and influence is gone. As for their works that Satan is still leveraging, sad for them. As for their good works unto the Lord, glory to God! And if that's the case, what about more ordinary folks? In fact, the Kingdom of God has *always* grown and prospered, mostly through labors in obscurity by supposedly ordinary people. You know, clerks...nurses...teachers...pastors...plumbers. The chances of us knowing any of those 100 years later is nearly zero. But God knows and his rewards are eternal!

And that's *God's genius of our laboring in obscurity*. Our obscurity—when astutely and enthusiastically embraced as our privileged lifestyle...as our fruitful mindset...as our foundational privilege in life in serving God and His Kingdom—well, then, that's what propels us to fulfilling God's plan and purposes. That can range from being great parents...to being fruitful Kingdom-citizens...to being loving neighbors...to being superior contributors of strong impact in our workplaces—yes, it's all being active witnesses for God.

Truth is, you really do have a rather full sense of all of this, but nearly 100% of the work done every day in this world, even today, is *unknown or relatively hidden or ignored as simply inconsequential* except to the few people it directly involves. How about a sales call to a new prospect? Just the two of you. How about cutting hair? Just a couple of people involved! How about a doctor's visit? A handful of people in the process. *Yeah, but it's still all about workplace excellence, impacting locally, each and every day!*

But it's also about family. How about raising a baby? Just the parents and a relatively few others directly involved. How about serving elderly parents in their home or maybe at a nursing facility? Just a few people involved...maybe just you, emotionally devastated as you watch a parent decline. Despair easily abounds: *doesn't anyone else care, today, tomorrow, 100 years from now?* The truth is, God Himself—the One from the Cross—He is the Only One who deeply understands your abject anguish—and He has graciously appointed you to labor in your obscurity...you, ministering to those who receive...and those who participate...and those who watch. And He will faithfully reward all those who build on His foundation. (See 1 Corinthians 3:9-16). And let me more fully inform you with this shocking statement...laboring and serving in obscurity is *the core way we are called to partner with God in helping to build His Kingdom*. You know, just as God's Son did at Calvary. Selfless, diligent obscurity. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "...each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers." (1 Corinthians 3: 8-9)

Some experts tout the idea that each of us really only truly "knows" about 600 people. Isn't that a bit shocking? Yes, we might go a lifetime only truly connecting at a truly meaningful level with a relatively few family members, a few co-workers, some neighbors, a smattering of long-time church friends. So. Are you rightly rejoicing in your labors in obscurity...recognizing that God's very purposes are embedded not in a fame where we might be so easily distracted...but in the dailyness of impact—that with a depth we cannot possibly grasp until our Judgment Seat experience? And, for those seeking a Spirit-led, obedient life in Christ, that will be a time of great rewarding. This is the genius of God: He looks for the humble of heart. And He promises that He will reward us for our selfless serving of others, our laboring in obscurity. So, go forth and work diligently, joyfully, and...yes...obscurely for your Audience of One!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Is your mindset such that you rejoice in your appointed labors of obscurity? Why or why not? Discuss.
2. Are all "labors in obscurity" the same in the eyes of heaven? Let's say your sister in Christ meets one-on-one with a sinner who then repents...and angels rejoice in heaven! (Luke 15:10) The same day, another sister in Christ feeds a hungry sinner without reference to Christ, so the sinner doesn't repent in the context of a generous gesture. Will angels rejoice in heaven? Discuss.
3. Read 1 Corinthians 3:9-15. Then discuss: how do you personally determine which categories or types of your deeds are truly "built on the foundation of Christ" ...?