

Three Important Personal Milestones

A Testimony to God's Faithfulness

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Three Important Personal Milestones

I am about to be eighty-seven and life goes through very quickly. In God's mercy, when I was about fourteen I knew a number of young folks who were believers. They were decidedly worldly in those days, and there came a man to our assembly with charts on Prophecy. I didn't understand much, but I saw the effect on those young folks. It transformed them. Some of them became preachers; some brought up children and were great supports to their churches. I wanted to be like them.

As a young man I used to read the Bible and got very little out of it, so I decided to check out whether these Christians that talked about what wonderful times they had in the Bible—whether it was real. I said, 'I am going to read this part of the Bible, whether I get anything out of it or not, and give the Lord a chance to speak to me and show me.' I could take you to the place, if you were in England, where the Lord spoke to me through his word. I have known that continuously since then.

So the first bit of advice would be: you all differ in temperament, but do take God seriously and let him speak his will to you, reveal himself to you.

Then with me it was a question: how did I make my job forward the interests of Christ? Some servants of God, like Paul the apostle, had a job—he made sailcloth. He used it to pay his expenses as a missionary. Some of the great missionary work he did depended on his being able to pay his own way. When he was at Ephesus and he preached, there was a church formed and it had elders. When he left them, he said to the elders of that church, 'I have shown you an example: I have paid for myself and my team, I have visited and I have preached.'

So, make your job serve the interests of the Lord, whether it is a profession that brings you near to people, or whether it is a question of making the money necessary. But let the service of the Lord be your number one motivation in your daily work.

My third thing was a discovery that 'God is faithful'. What I mean by that is, I had determined, as best I could, to make my job serve the Lord. In God's mercy, I became a student. I read Greek and Latin, and I got the opportunity to read some Hebrew. Then I got the chance to do some work-training on the manuscripts of the Bible, and how we can be sure we have what the original writers wrote.

That came to an end when I was thirty, and what job should I do? I found it very difficult, and began to wonder whether my desire to serve the Lord had been so unrealistic that I was

now unprepared for life, without a job. I was to go to Egypt to put together a very ancient papyrus to do with the Bible. Just at the moment when I was ready to go, and had the funds arranged, I got a letter from a French Professor, saying that his student had worked on it, and he forbade me to go. He would see to it that if I wrote anything, it would not be published. That brought that to an end, so what on earth was I going to do?

A job came up in Durham University, so I went there.¹ It was a five-year contract, and it came to an end. In the late days of those five years I still had no job. The universities were not interested in what I was doing anyway. A position came up for a university, where I knew well the men who were there, and they said, 'Thank you very much for replying', but they didn't choose me. I had applied to another university and they didn't even bother to reply.

Then one morning I went down to one of the colleges where I was a member. It was lunch time, but it was during the vacation and only a few students were present. At high table there was nobody there except myself. They were in process of doing a lot of spring cleaning and the crockery on the table was very odd. I noticed one thing that had a motto on it in Latin, and it read *TU MIHI DEUS QUID DEEST?* It means, Thou art a God to me, what shall I need—what shall I want? It was a voice from God to me at that stage when I despaired of getting a job.

Within a few weeks I was appointed in Ireland.² What a boon that has been to me! As distinct from staying in England, coming to Ireland I found it had many connections with America that we didn't have in England, because of all the emigrants from Ireland to America. The keenness of the believers here and the large numbers of them were a colossal encouragement to me. So now, at eighty-seven, I am not sure whether I am still English or whether I have qualified to become Irish; but I record the kindness of the Lord's people to me over those many years. Then there came the work in Russia and Ukraine, and still ongoing in China and Burma.

I cite it all to encourage you to determine to make your life significant for the Lord. Whatever job he gives you to do, whether it is merely earning money to feed yourself, or the work itself is important, or Christian work—whatever you do, make your life count for God. It might lead you up what seems to be a closed alleyway, but trust the Lord that if you make your life count for God as best you know how, under his guidance he will be faithful to you and give you the desire of your heart.

So thank you for listening to this old boy!

¹ Post Doctoral Research Fellow of the Durham Colleges, 1954-59.

² Queen's University, Belfast. Lecturer, Reader in Classics, 1959-78; Professor of Old Testament Greek, 1979; Professor of Greek, 1983; Professor Emeritus, 1986.

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.