

Not in Vain

Probably our greatest hindrance in doing the will of God is the fact that it involves sacrifice.

The Christian life seems to be a strange experience in this way, and many people (even believers) today either choose to gloss over the uncomfortable component of sacrifice or ignore it altogether.

Even during the joyous celebration of Christmas, as believers, we should not overlook the fact that the baby in the manger was destined for the cross. The truth remains that our salvation, God's free gift to us, was not without cost.

First of all, it cost God the Father the life of His Son. When Christ paid the full price for our redemption, we were born anew, but this was only the beginning of our transformation. In addition, the full measure of peace and contentment that God intends for us to enjoy in this life will come only at the expense of our being willing to give up all claims to doing it our way.

Most of us find the stories of those who have abandoned everything and suffered great loss for the sake of the gospel deeply moving. You may have thought about these courageous, self-sacrificing men and women and wondered, as I did, Could I do that?

Heidi Baker is a missionary evangelist who exemplifies this kind of fearless devotion to God.

Heidi and her husband, Rolland, left behind a privileged lifestyle in California in order to serve the Lord around the globe among people with tremendous needs. They have planted hundreds of churches and minister to thousands of orphans in a place we seldom hear about, Mozambique, Africa.

Heidi has paid a high price to follow the Lord, but her sermons and writings bear no hint of regret. She's honest enough to tell you that it's not been easy. Her family has endured more attacks and struggles than you could ever imagine. But I suspect she only makes mention of them in order to remove any illusions others may have about missionary life.

In return for her obedience, she has been rewarded with that ever-elusive thing that we all want—fruitfulness. Bear with me when I tell you that this subject hits extremely close to home. I certainly don't want to leave here, as the old folks say, "with my work undone."

I'm sure God doesn't want that either. His desire is that we bear fruit that will last forever (see John 15:16). And He has made it possible.

He has chosen to love us, provide for us and equip us. In turn, by the power of His Spirit, we can love Him intimately, lay down our lives daily, and trust Him to accomplish through us all He's placed us here to do.

It's not easy to read about the sacrifices and exploits of people like Heidi and Rolland and not feel challenged in your own life. Some of us find it hard to imagine that our efforts are making much of an impact, or that we're doing all we can for the Lord. But as long as we walk in obedience, we will make a difference.

Whenever you are tempted to examine the fruit of your life, remember that it may be too early to check. Instead, think about Paul's words: "Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58, NIV).