

Relationship vs. Reward

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By Tony Stith

ZIMMERMAN, Minn.—On Dec. 17, 1903, brothers Wilbur and Orville Wright successfully made the first controlled, powered and sustained heavier-than-air human flight.

The Wright brothers weren’t alone in their quest to conquer the air. Their main source of competition was from a man named Dr. Samuel Langley. Dr. Langley was the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and, therefore, had many more resources available to him than had the Wright Brothers. He also had a \$50,000 grant with which to develop his flying machine.

In terms of resources, Wilbur and Orville could not compete. Both high-school dropouts, they had no association, no \$50,000 grant, no connections, nothing. What little resources they did have came from earnings from their small bicycle-repair and -sales shop.

But what Orville and Wilbur lacked in resources they made up for in passion. Of their passion for pursuing their dream of flight Orville is quoted as saying, “We could hardly wait to get up in the morning.”

That passion drove them to undertake endless days and nights of methodical research, countless hours of rigorous testing, punctuated by failed attempts and disappointments too numerous to number.

It’s said that when the brothers took to the fields to test out the latest iteration of their flying machine, it became their practice to take along a replacement for every part on the machine, assuming mishaps and failures to be inevitable. Their passion for the idea of flight allowed them to rise above any obstacle, any setback they might experience.

In contrast, their chief competitor, Dr. Langley, it seems, was motivated primarily by the glory he anticipated receiving for being first to achieve flight. It’s telling that, after the Wright brothers ultimately achieved success that day in mid-December, Dr. Langley, rather than building upon what had been accomplished, simply walked away. Once there was no prospect of personal reward and glory, there remained for him no motivation to continue.

In so many areas of life, the thing that sets ultimate success apart from failure is passion. This principle is nowhere more true than in our Christian walk.

You'd be hard pressed to find any greater example of passion for God and His ways than David. Called as a ruddy shepherd boy, he certainly possessed no physical qualities or resources that would inspire anyone to deem him worthy of being chosen king of Israel. But David had something that made up for all he lacked.

In Psalm 27:4 David writes: "One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple."

I find that what David doesn't say here is more instructive than what he does say. We don't read here of his desire to seek the Lord "that I may be crowned a king and a priest and rule in Your Kingdom." Or "that I may be clothed with immortality and power."

He just doesn't seem to be wrapped up in the glory that he ultimately will receive as a child of God.

Where was his primary focus? "To dwell with the Lord," to "gaze at the beauty of the Lord" and to "seek Him in His temple."

In short, what motivated David was his passion for walking, now and forever, in close, intimate relationship with His Savior.

Can you and I say the same?

Is the thing that primarily motivates us to walk this walk our expectation for the promised reward, the hope of glory and immortality to come, or is it our passion for this relationship we have been given?

Let me ask it a different way.

If there was no hope of eternal reward and glory, would your love for the Lord and the way He has taught be enough to sustain you in this path? Do you consider the gift of your relationship with Him so precious that you would seek Him and His ways regardless of the reward?

It goes without saying that the promised reward we have waiting at the end of this path should give us hope. Even David yearned for that time when he said, ". . . You will not allow my body to see decay . . . You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand" (Psalm 16:10-11).

Even when looking to that future reward, however, David focused not on the crown and glory he would receive but on "being filled with joy in Your presence." His primary hope for the future was in a continuation of the relationship he was experiencing with his Lord in the present. It was his passion for that relationship that sustained him through the failures, the setbacks, disappointments of life.

For Orville and Wilbur, being the first to achieve flight, reaping the rewards, the accolades, the glory, although surely meaningful were really just icing on the cake. Their true joy and fulfillment came from their love and passion for flying. Their success simply meant that they would continue to pursue that passion for the rest of their lives.

One day you and I will, by the grace of God, be among the first to take flight, albeit flight of an entirely different nature from what Orville and Wilbur ever contemplated. As the firstfruits of His harvest, we will someday rise to meet our Lord in the air at His return.

Yes, there will be thrones and dominions to be had. Yes, immortality and power will be our reward. But the real joy, the ultimate reward, will not be the crown but the continuation of our relationship with our Lord, to "seek Him in His temple" for all eternity.