

March 26, 2011

Are You A Christian Malingerer?

***"As a door turns on its hinges,
so a sluggard turns on his bed.
The sluggard buries his hand in the dish;
he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth"
(Proverbs 26:14,15)***

Years ago while I (Mike) was stationed aboard a Navy ship off Vietnam, a problem of malingering was manifesting itself among the ship's crew. The word "malingerer" isn't used much today, but the effects of someone who continually shirks responsibility or pretends to be sick to avoid doing their part is devastating on the confines of a military vessel. It was already a difficult time emotionally; everyone knew the war was already lost. All that remained was for the treaty to be signed.

One night at Officer's Call the Executive Officer (XO) of the ship cited that over 10% of the crew were reporting to Sick Bay each morning feigning illness of one sort or another. Malingering is a punishable offense if you can prove it, especially since others then have to pick up the extra workload. It's a real morale killer!

Even though I was part of the helicopter detachment onboard and not ship's company, I volunteered to straighten the problem out. The next morning I showed up in Sick Bay during Sick Call. The ship's doctor, Jerry, was a good friend of mine. When I arrived, he was seeing a patient in one of the examining rooms. About 60 men were waiting in line for their turn, and none of them looked particularly sick.

I walked up to the Chief Corpsman for a private conversation. "You've really got a problem here..." The Chief replied, "It's got us in an awful place. The XO wants this malingering stopped, but we can't turn anyone away who shows up here." Glancing over at the long line, I smiled slightly. "Would you like some help?" Taken aback, the Chief arched his brows but answered, "Sure, but what can *you* do?" I grinned, "Give me a white smock to put over my flight suit, and just follow my lead."

The Chief and I then walked up to the first man in line. I raised my voice so that ALL could hear. "What's ailing you?" The man was somewhat startled but murmured, "I've got this stiffness in my shoulder and I don't think I can do my job." "What's your job?" the Chief asked. The young man replied, "I'm a radar operator." I directed him toward an open examining room. "Go in there, drop your pants and lean over the table." The young man turned toward the Chief and bellowed, "It's my shoulder, not my butt!" The Chief calmly responded, "Lieutenant Dowgiewicz needs to give you a thorough exam." Gesturing toward me the sailor exclaimed, "He's not even a doctor!" The Chief retorted, "He knows what he's doing!"

The man hesitated as he eyeballed both of us. He then turned away and left Sick Bay, with about 55 other wide-eyed guys following him. That ended the malingering. As I took off the smock the Chief stood there with a Cheshire cat grin. At that moment the doctor came out of the exam room, surprised to see only a few sailors left in line. "Where'd they all go?" he asked incredulously. Still smiling broadly the Chief answered, "Lieutenant Dowgiewicz healed them!"

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through trust and patience inherit what has been promised" (Hebrews 6:11,12)

It's no surprise to our Father how complacent humans can become. This is especially true as we neglect interpersonal responsibilities to others. There are 54 "one-anothering" commands in the Newer Testament. Each of these commands is designed for Jesus followers to reflect His love to others in His family. Ask yourself this. In your daily life are you actively engaged in *being His blessing* to others — loving and serving as His hands and heart? Or, would our Lord call you a "malingerer?"

Jesus voiced a parable in Matthew 25:14-30 to warn us about being lazy in fulfilling responsibilities He's assigned to His own. (Keep in mind that he related this to *His disciples*, knowing that they would eventually be sharing this admonition with other believers after His resurrection.) Leaving on a journey, a man entrusts his three servants with various amounts of money, each according to their ability. When he returns and asks them to render account, he discovers that the wicked, lazy one did nothing with the resources given him. Rather, he maligned the character of his master, using his own disregard for the man's authority as an excuse to spurn responsibility.

Listen to the point our Lord Jesus makes. It's a warning to each of us to be diligent in our obedient trust rather than self-serving and rebellious as the world is: *"Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (v.30).

The Bible leaves no doubt that authentic faith is evidenced by your actions. (See James 2:14-26, for example.) If the Spirit of Christ is dwelling within you, *you* are His instrument of blessing to others. Even the Israelites recognized their responsibility as His people to follow through in response to need: *"Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act"* (Proverbs 3:27). The love that was manifested in Jesus motivated Him to turn water into wine and heal the sick and the blind. It was within *His power to act*. Through the Spirit at work in and through you, what is within *your power to act* to help others?

Discuss with your family or faith family your interpersonal responsibilities toward others.

The commands below written through God's spokesmen can be a starting point for you:

- *"Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you"* (Luke 6:28).
- *"Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness"* (Hebrews 3:13).
- *"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling"* (1 Peter 4:9).
- *"And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased"* (Hebrews 13:16).

If you've been shirking the responsibilities our Lord Jesus has made so clear to His beloved sheep in His Word, please read our October 1998 Newsletter, *The Almost Christian*, a free download at our website. It may give you some valuable insights to refresh your loving determination to press on in His steps.

A word to the wise:

**David, who well understood both
the overwhelming mercy of God
as well as his own responsibility to Him,
asked this poignant question:
"LORD, who may abide in Your sanctuary?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?" (Psalm 15).
His response reveals the heart determination of those
whose actions align with their words:
"He who walks uprightly,
And works righteousness,
And speaks the truth in his heart;...
"He who keeps his oath even when it hurts."**

This passage has very practical considerations even for your priorities with the resources Father has entrusted to you. We've met many missionaries and others who've gone forth relying on the promise of support from people who later abruptly reneged on giving. While financial situations can obviously change, those to whom help was promised are often left in the dark, wondering what happened. Ask yourself this. Have you malingered by not keeping your word to someone who had been counting on your help?

Please, examine your life and the words you speak. Don't make casual promises, then back down. Ask those close to you for their observations about you:

- Are you a malingerer? Or, do your actions reflect our Lord's love for others through you?
- Does your word really matter, especially when it's difficult for you to keep it? What you

speaking goes far beyond the moment: *"I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken"* (Matthew 12:36). In our years of ministry we've encountered many who were emotionally scarred by the unkept promises of others.

We sensed from our Lord that we should share this warning because you may be among those who are choosing self-pursuit over obeying the Lord you say you love. Is your walk coinciding with your talk? Please, take the time with others close to you in the faith to discuss if you're responsive to our Lord in what He's calling you to do in Him. Ask them if they see determination to follow through in what you say. Your very words and responsiveness reflect the depth of your bond with both Lord Jesus and with others.

Sharing in love according to the measure of faith He has given us,

Mike & Sue