



WOW: Word Of the Week

TIMBER!

November 16, 2022

TIMBER! The cry of the worker felling a tree in the woods; a warning to others that a tree is about to fall. This week, our weekly WOW reminds us of a biblical principle: Christians must stay spiritually sharp!

Ecclesiastes 10:10 states, "A dull ax requires more strength, be wise and sharpen your blade." Abraham Lincoln is credited with saying, "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe."

I understand the principle of Solomon's teaching, but I must confess that I do not have much experience using an axe. My Michigan tree cutting experience involved felling trees using my chainsaws, cutting to firewood length, and then using a splitting maul and wedges to finish the project. I am grateful that my experience in cutting firewood began alongside some experienced persons. I watched as they stopped frequently to adjust and sharpen the chains on their saws. I learned the importance of keeping the chain oiled. I learned that operating my chainsaw required little effort on my part when the chain was adjusted and sharpened correctly. I learned how to restore the cutting edge to the teeth on the chain. The key was working smarter rather than working harder.

I owned at least two chains for each of my chainsaws. I did not throw away a chain just because it became dull. I got it sharpened and restored professionally and, in the meantime, I used my second chain. There were still trees to be felled and firewood to be cut.

I see life lessons. First, to maintain our cutting edge in life, we must accept the fact that losing our cutting edge is a part of being useful. An unused chain doesn't get dull. The truth is that simply living life dulls the chain. Continual sharpening is an essential part of being used by God for his purposes. Second, we are going to face life situations that "dull the chain," moments when we cannot effectively accomplish certain tasks. Those moments only dictate our future if we let them, if we fail to sharpen the chain and continue onward. We must not dwell on past failures. Third, when the cutting edge is dulled, it is time to sharpen the chain. Fourth, sharpening the chain must be done frequently. Fifth, when the chain becomes dull, it does no good to blame other factors. Denying the problem changes nothing; continuing to work with a dull chain is more hindrance than help. Ultimate lesson: stay sharp.

Inexperienced workers often fail to understand the importance of investing time in the time-consuming tasks of adjusting and sharpening the chain. They work harder and harder while others are restoring the cutting edge. They mistake times of adjustment and sharpening for resting. Their key is not in laboring more if we are in fact accomplishing less.

Many ineffective people are not lazy, they are working with a dull chain. They serve as examples of the truth that being busy does not mean we are accomplishing a lot in God's purpose. Life dulls the chain. The solution is not to work harder and harder because of waning effectiveness. The solution is to take time for reshaping. Too many Christians, preachers, teachers, leaders are not reshaping themselves; they do not know how to reshape. The chain must be sharpened at the correct angle, oiled and tensioned correctly. When the chain is maintained and used correctly, it lasts a lot longer.

But the greatest lesson is that we save time and accomplish much more when we take time for regular sharpening. Self-maintenance, readjustment, sharpening.

Do you know how to do this in your own spiritual life? That is the topic of next week's WOW.