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### *People Spot Missile: On Doing the Homework*

I was recently reading an article on Matt Wieters, a catcher for the Baltimore Orioles. The article talked about his preparation for the job. He arrives at the park at 1:00 for a 7:00 o'clock game. He reviews film of the hitters his pitchers will face. He watches how those hitters have fared against pitchers similar in style to the O's pitcher going that night. He is recognized as a good handler of pitchers. It sounds like he is doing his homework. If it is important for a baseball player to do homework, it is much more important for people doing Kingdom work.

What is homework? It is the behinds the scene work that nobody sees unless it isn't done. Seldom do people get credit for it. Seldom do people say you did a good job doing that homework. All they see is the end product without understanding how that successful event happened.

I have watched some people that I know and respect who have grown spiritually in a significant way. As I talk with them, I discover there was no magical formula. They spent time in fruitful worship, reading their Bible, praying, and associating with others who will lift them up and encourage them. Over time, doing the homework pays off in spiritual growth. Then when they face difficult issues they have something to fall back on. The lessons learned in the good times support them in the difficult ones.

For instance, a pastor spends hours in sermon preparation, and preparation for delivery so that the Sunday morning homily touches hearts. I've heard people marvel at a pastor who is very consistently good in the pulpit. They just don't understand the hours of work that is involved in study and effort week after week. They never shoot from the hip in the old gunslinger style. (Shooting from the hip means walking into the pulpit unprepared and just spouting off.)

I think of the musician who is quite accomplished. That takes hours and hours of practice. To stay at a very competent level they have to continue to practice or the quality of their efforts will disappear. People marvel at how good they are without understanding the hours and hours it takes to get to that level and stay there.

I once learned of a very competent singer who was good enough to be a guest soloist for one of the big bands. She chose to get married and have a family. Certainly, nothing wrong with that.

But she quit singing. She later was heard to sing in a small country church and her presentation was a mere shadow of her former abilities. Homework is required.

I recently heard of a country singer who burst suddenly upon the national scene. He was quizzed about his “instant success.” He smiled and pointed out the 15 years of working in small places struggling to make a living. He was doing his homework.

A special event at a church is a rousing success. People marvel about that. What they don’t see is weeks and months of preparation. The strategies of planning and promotion that made that event successful are not really visible. They did their homework.

Frankly, it has constantly amazed me how many times in the church we are looking for the shortcuts that will eliminate the homework. Most of the time the shortcuts just aren’t productive. We are disappointed in the results. The homework is a prerequisite to success. One of the reasons the homework is not done, we don’t allow enough preparation time to adequately do the necessary homework.

What is the homework? The essential behind the scenes work that no one sees, unless it isn’t done.

*I am now available to present “The Role of the Church in the Civil War”, “Starting a New Service”, “Churches Have Personalities”, “People Spots”, “Does Your Church Really Care About People?” and “A Christian Perspective on Leadership Skills.” “Stewardship and Managing Debt” jm*

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