

Have you ever felt that you have laboured in vain?

I've been at Syncrude for 28 years. Over that time I've implemented many computer systems, some of them complex and quite major. And, over that time I've seen most of them ripped out to be replaced, not always by something better.

And sometimes I've asked myself: Why do I bother?

Think over your own life: do you have any examples where you've worked at something, and after that looking at the results, or perhaps the feedback or pay you received, you asked yourself: "why do I bother?"

You work all your life, and the stock market goes down, so your pension suffers. Or, the company cuts back on your pension. Or, you've been self-employed all your life, so you don't have a pension – so you have to keep on working, making ends meet. Or you run into some financial problems, or you get sick, or stuff just happens!

Why do we bother? Why do ANY of us bother? It often seems that everything we do just disappears, and is as if it never was.

There's the poem "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley which ends:

"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!

Nothing beside remains.  
Round the decay Of that colossal Wreck,  
boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Why do we bother? What remains of all we do?

The prophet Isaiah is asking that question. He says:

"God, you called me.  
You made me a useful tool for you, a sword in your hand,  
an arrow in your quiver – someone you could wield to do your will.

And I have tried!  
Oh I have tried, Oh Lord  
(just read the first 48 chapters of Isaiah's book to see how he tried!).

But your people never listened to me.  
They never, ever listened, they didn't follow you –  
and now they are killed, or in hiding or in exile to the Babylonians.  
Our nation has been conquered. I have laboured in vain, all is lost.

*Why did I bother?*

God's reply to Isaiah is very interesting – He says:

"What you were trying to do – that is TOO SMALL.

You are not just to restore Israel! You are to restore the world!  
You are a light to the nations, the declarer that my salvation reaches over all the earth.  
You are presently despised and rejected/abhorred, but  
rulers of nations shall bow down because of Me, who has chosen you.”

His very words:

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to restore the survivors of Israel;  
I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth....”

Isaiah complains: “God, all is lost – everything I've done has come for nought, I am spent with nothing to show for it.”

God replies: “Isaiah, you haven't seen anything yet. You thought you were doing a mighty work on a big stage – I tell, you, you were doing a work on a small stage. You shall yet see a mighty work on a mighty stage!”

And in Jesus, God did just that – a mighty work on a mighty stage. And God still speaks to us, even today, through these words of Isaiah – Isaiah still lights the way for us.

The Bible, in some ways especially Isaiah, is all about human life with God – how God has made this life with Him possible, and will bring it to pass. God's everlasting intent is that we should be, in every way, a dwelling place of God.

Jesus came, and John the Baptist declared “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” In other words: “Here is the sacrifice of God who will remove the results of our fallen nature, from us all.” This is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Through Jesus, God wants to be in communion, abiding, with everybody. As the Psalm says:

“Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.  
Happy are those who make the Lord their trust.”

This is a choice! Will we trust in Jesus, in God, or will we trust in something else? God doesn't want our wealth or impoverishment – He wants us to delight in Him and do His will. He wants to share His wholeness, His health, His peace with us so we can share His salvation, faithfulness, and steadfast love with Him. He wants us to trust Him. He wants us to share our lives with Him.

As Paul wrote:

“God has sovereign power and presence with us.  
Through the gift of God's grace, we are called to be a holy people.  
God is faithful: by Him we are called into the fellowship of His Son,  
in Him we are enriched and strengthened, in Him we lack nothing.”

How do we do this? How are you and I to live our lives in such a fashion that they are not in vain, that God is glorified and people's lives are transformed, that people may know healing and peace and love? By following the example given to us today in the good news. We are to ask: “Lord, where are you staying?” We are to receive Jesus' invitation: “come and see.” And we are to come and see where He is staying, and remain with Him. Abide with Him. Live with Him. Conversely, we are let Jesus abide

with us – live with us.

Those computer systems I helped to put in -- they helped the company, they were fun puzzles, they were intellectually challenging, they had me work with some wonderful people to help make them happen, and they put food on the table, paid for my house, and helped me take care of my family -- and then they went away. They were not a waste of time, but like everything else in creation, they were not intended to be permanent. Even the Rocky Mountains, thousands of metres high, are not intended to be permanent. At some point, they too will be worn down to nothing.

When I was young, my Dad also was an Anglican Priest. I can remember thinking one day: “people who build things, like bridges or buildings, if they are lucky what they have built will last for hundreds, and in a few cases, even thousands of years – but most last just for a few years. But my Dad – he works with peoples' souls – and that has an impact for eternity.”

Your soul, and the soul of every other human, is intended to exist for eternity. God's intent is that for that eternity, we abide in Him, and He in us. The love of God is permanent. The most permanent thing we can do in our life is to establish and nurture our relationship with our heavenly Father, through Jesus His Son. There are tools to help us: prayer, scripture reading, fasting, tithing, meditation, worship and devotion, etc. -- and they are tools we should indeed use.

But the first thing you have to realize: in fact, the **ONLY** thing you have to realize – the wonderful, exciting, sacrificing, mind-blowing, saving, inexpressible LOVE that God has for you, and for everyone. You are wonderfully made. You are loved more than life itself. Jesus DID die on the cross for you, for no other reason than that He loved you so much He knew it was worth it. He is the Lamb of God. He died to bring you into the household of God – you and everyone else on this planet. That is the first thing you have to do. Realize just how much you are, indeed, loved.

Put everything else in your life out of your mind, and just say: “Jesus, I accept your love. I want you in. I want you to live with me. I want to be one with You. I want wholeness in You. I want health in You. I want salvation in You. Please come in Me, and be my Saviour.” -- say those words, and mean them.

You are a dwelling place of God. Come and see. Abide with Him. Be at one with Him. Let Him in, and know His love for you. The rest? It will come, and it will go – but your life with God: THAT is permanent. THAT is worth building. THAT – is never in vain. May you know the joy of God With You for evermore. To God be the glory; Amen.