

Staying With The Puck

by Charles Whitaker
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"Because I go where the puck is going to be, not where it is." That was Wayne Gretzky's answer to a reporter who asked him why he was such an exceptional hockey player. Gretzky, center for the Los Angeles Kings and the National Hockey League's all-time leading scorer with more than 802 career goals, agilely stays with the puck. When it changes direction, so does he.

How agile, how flexible, does Gretzky have to be to move with the puck throughout a game?

Imagine what a diagram charting the course of a puck during a hockey game would look like. If you traced out the path that little disk took over an entire game, you would find it had zigzagged all over the ice. Your chart would have literally hundreds of crisscrossed lines, some long, many others short, at every angle imaginable. The chart would also reflect Gretzky's movements, had he played in that game, as he changed course time after time, keeping close to the puck.

Your puck chart might look much like a diagram of God's Work over the last six millennia. That Work has zigged and zagged as God has changed its direction. Some aspects of His Work, represented by long lines, seem to go on for decades, even centuries. Other aspects—those short lines—last for only a few years. Sometimes the Work skewed off at strange angles.

The puck chart, as we saw, reflects the movements of the disk and of Gretzky. Does the chart of God's Work, with its many long and short lines at different angles, reflect our movements in His church? Have we changed our focus as God alters the direction of His Work? These are important questions, for we today, as players on the ice, are living among those lines. Are we wandering away from God's Work, or are we carefully staying with the puck?

God tells His people exactly what their assignments are, for "He does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants" (Amos 3:7). He also makes it clear when they have finished that Work. When that time comes, God expects them to have the flexibility to change focus as He changes the direction of His Work. The Bible records the experiences of some of God's workers who stayed with the puck as it changed direction.

Building Another Ark

Genesis 6:14 records God's commission to Noah: "Make yourself an ark. . . ." Shortly after the Flood, God made it clear to Noah that his work of preserving human and animal life through the ark was finished. This He did by telling Noah, "Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (Genesis 9:11; cf. 8:21).

In practically the same breath, God explicitly gave Noah a new and different work: to repopulate the planet (Genesis 9:1, 7) and to reestablish a governmental system (Genesis 9:5-6). What if Noah had refused to change? What if he had started to build another ark against the day of a future flood?

God told Noah what job he was to perform. He told him of the change in direction of His work and of his role in that new work. Noah obeyed. He stayed with the puck.

Moses is another good example. God told him exactly what his work was to be: At the burning bush, He informed Moses that He would "send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people . . . out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10). Later, He also told Moses precisely when that work would be over—after wandering in the wilderness for forty years (Numbers 9:28-35)—but that Moses would not enter the land with the people. When the forty years were over, God told him to ascend Mount Nebo to die (Deuteronomy 32:48-52).

What if Moses had refused to obey God and instead determined to lead the people another forty years in the wilderness? Or to lead them across the Jordan River? Of course, God would not have permitted it. We will not succeed if we do not follow God's lead. As Deuteronomy 34:1-5 indicates, Moses did not resist God, recognizing that a change was to come at his death. He too stayed with the puck as it changed direction.

Solomon is another example of a worker who knew exactly what his task was and when it was finished. God told his father David that his yet unborn son "shall build a house for My name" (II Samuel 7:13; I Chronicles 17:12). Later, David took pains to instruct Solomon to "prosper and build the house of the LORD your God, as He has said to you" (I Chronicles 22:11). Solomon confirmed his knowledge of God's "assignment" when he dedicated the Temple (II Chronicles 6:8-10).

God told Solomon what He was to do, and Solomon knew when he had finished the task. "Solomon finished the house of the LORD and . . . successfully accomplished all that came into his heart to make in the house of the LORD" (II Chronicles 7:11). He realized when God had changed the focus of His work. He did not undertake to build God another Temple. Solomon too moved with the puck.

Making the Right Choices

John the Baptist affords an excellent New Testament example of God making clear what His servant's work was to be. Speaking to John's father, He said that John "will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children'" (Luke 1:16-17; *cf.* Malachi 4:4-5). Also, his work will be "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (verse 17). It follows that John's work was largely finished when Christ came, because one cannot prepare the way for another who has already arrived.

So it happened that, after John's arrest, his disciples were faced with a decision (Matthew 11:2-3). Should they consider "their" work done and simply return to everyday life? Or should they follow Christ, whose path they had helped make straight? Or should they keep on doing John's work—continue to prepare the way for Christ?

Some of John's disciples undoubtedly made the right choice and followed Christ. Did others continue doing John's preparatory work, refusing to change course? Were some still "preparing" Christ's path after His ascension? If so, they missed the opportunity to be a part of the work God was doing through His Son in the flesh. They failed to stay with the puck!

Nehemiah and Jeremiah are among other examples that show God explicitly telling His faithful servants what work they are to do. None of them resisted Him when He exercised His prerogative to change the direction of His work. When God zigged, they zigged. If He zagged, so did they.

The same God who ruled His work in their days rules today's church. And, true to form, He has revealed to us exactly what our work is: to prepare ourselves to be His Bride (Revelation 19:7). This

represents a change in direction from the work we were doing less than a decade ago. With the death of Mr. Herbert Armstrong, God zigged. Did we? Or did we zag? Could some of us be trying to build another ark?

Wayne Gretzky is a successful hockey player because he moves agilely with the puck. We will be successful workers for God if we are equally agile, following every turn of His work. Stay with the puck!