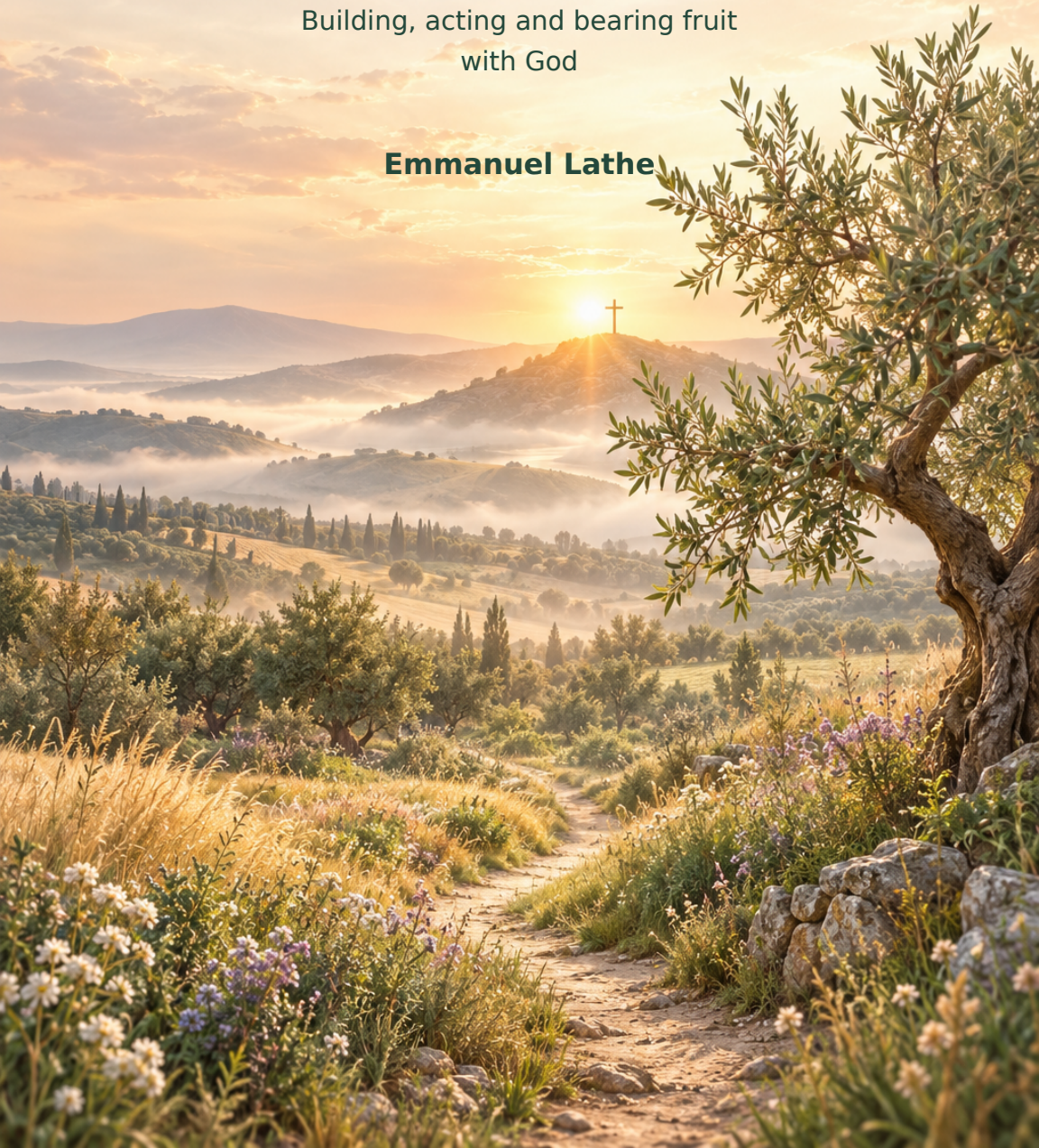


A COLLECTION OF SERMONS

WORKING WITH GOD

Building, acting and bearing fruit
with God

Emmanuel Lathe



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Three messages, one journey

God may place an opportunity before a person, but that person must still recognize it, seize it and develop it. Opportunity calls for action. That action is strengthened by the people who sharpen us and the partners who help us carry the harvest. Yet it remains dependent on God: unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. On Mount Carmel, this relationship becomes a striking picture: Elijah prepares the altar; God sends the fire.

PART ONE

When iron sharpens iron

Divine connections, relationships and partnerships that help fulfilment move forward.

Main passage: Proverbs 27:17. Supporting passages: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Ruth 2:1-12; 1 Samuel 18:1-4; Acts 18:24-28; Luke 5:1-7; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9.

Remembering the previous teaching

We began by learning that work has a divine dimension. God may place the game before us, but we must still take hold of it. We must then develop what we have received through action, understanding, wisdom and excellence.

One danger remains: believing that we can accomplish everything alone. The original teaching introduced Proverbs 27:17 at this point, encouraging us to learn from other people's experience rather than relying exclusively on our own.

Some opportunities cannot be seized alone. Some doors require a connection. Some of the knowledge you need is already held by someone else. Sometimes progress begins when God brings a person across your path.

1. God uses people to sharpen people

Proverbs 27:17 compares the influence people have on one another with iron sharpening iron. The French source notes the distinctive wording of the Louis Segond 1910 translation and draws on the Parole de Vie rendering to emphasize the effect of human contact: something develops in us through our encounter with another person.

Iron does not sharpen itself. It needs another piece of iron.

There is someone who knows what you do not know, who has experienced what you are only beginning, who has a complementary skill, or who can identify a weakness you have not noticed.

Isolation may sometimes protect your ego, but it can slow your development. You must be humble enough to learn.

There are things God will teach you directly in his presence. There are also things he will choose to teach you through a person. If you systematically reject people, you may reject some of the instruments God has chosen to sharpen you.

Someone who sharpens you is not necessarily superior to you in every area. Two pieces of iron can sharpen one another. The relationship is also one of mutual growth.

2. Two are better than one

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says that two are better than one because their labour brings a good return. If one falls, the other can help them up; the person who falls alone has no companion to lift them.

Notice the connection with work. The passage does more than describe a pleasant relationship. It links partnership with the fruit of labour. There is strength in collaboration.

One person may have the idea, another the skill, another the funding, another the network, and another the experience. When God brings the right people together around a vision, something that might have taken ten years can sometimes move forward much more quickly.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 adds that two can stand against someone who would overpower one, and that a three-stranded cord is not easily broken.

Connection brings more than speed. It also brings resilience. Someone may have abandoned a struggle alone yet keep going because another person is there to say: keep going; do not give up; look at it differently; we will find a solution.

3. God may place your next season within an encounter

Ruth goes out to glean. Ruth 2:3 describes her collecting grain behind the harvesters and coming to the field of Boaz, a relative of Elimelech. From a human perspective, it looks like an ordinary encounter. Yet that encounter changes her story.

Ruth does not stay home waiting for Boaz. She is working. This brings us back to the earlier teaching on Proverbs 12:27: activity places her where the connection can happen.

Some people ask God for connections while remaining shut away. Ruth met Boaz in a field where she was working.

Some connections come as you obey, work and move forward. Ruth probably did not leave home that morning thinking: today I will enter the field of a man who will play a decisive role in my future. She went out to work. The encounter followed her decision to move.

Movement can come before connection. That is why activity matters.