

Why Work?

2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13 (and other related texts)

I recently came upon an interesting study concerning job satisfaction in America. The National Opinion Research Center, housed at the University of Chicago, recently completed a major twenty-year study of job satisfaction in America. The study revealed that the ten most satisfying jobs in the U.S. are:

[slide: add these 10 job categories as I call the number:

- 1. Clergy**
- 2. Firefighters**
- 3. Physical Therapists**
- 4. Authors**
- 5. Special Education Teachers**
- 6. Teachers**
- 7. Education Administrators**
- 8. Painters and Sculptors**
- 9. Psychologists**
- 10. Security and Financial Services Salespeople]**

The ten least satisfying jobs are:

[slide: add these 10 job categories as I call the number:

- 1. (Nonconstruction) Laborers**
- 2. Clothing Salespeople**
- 3. Packagers**
- 4. Food Preparers**
- 5. Roofers**
- 6. Cashiers**
- 7. Furniture Salespeople**
- 8. Bartenders**
- 9. Freight Handlers**
- 10. Waiters**

[End slide]

If we had time today, it would be interesting to take a survey of our congregation and see how satisfied you are with your jobs. Of course, we all know that Americans love to complain about our jobs. Even clergy, who have more job satisfaction than any other vocation, tend to fuss about their work and how hard it is and how stressful it can be. But the truth is, work is at the center of our lives. Without some kind of work to do, life would be unbearable, which reminds me of an old story.

A hardworking man got sick and died. He immediately found himself in a beautiful place, surrounded by every conceivable comfort. A white-jacketed attendant came to him and said, "You may have anything you choose: any food, any pleasure, and any entertainment." The man was delighted, and for days he sampled all the things he had

only dreamed of on earth. But one day he grew bored. He called the attendant to him and said: “I’m tired of this. I need something to do. What kind of work can you give me?” The attendant shook his head and replied, “I’m sorry, sir. That is the one thing we cannot do for you. There is no work here for you. In fact, you can never work again.” The man answered, “That’s a fine thing. I might as well be in hell.” The attendant said, “Just where do you think you are?” Americans love to gripe about work. But the truth is, life without work would be hell. As a wise person once said, **[slide: (with construction workers in background) “Work is the scaffolding that holds up our adult lives.”]**

Since this is Labor Day weekend, it seemed a good time to talk about work. Every person in this congregation today works, in one way or another, from children to senior adults. We may work in school, or in a full-time or part-time job, or we may work at home, or we may work as a volunteer—but we all work. And work is an important part of God’s design. We need to remember that work is God’s idea. God created work in the first place. Please read Genesis 2:15 with me, **[slide (garden image in background): “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Gen. 2:15 NIV)]** From the beginning of creation, God placed work at the center of human life. Why is that? God created work because it meets some important human needs. Let’s quickly review four of them today. Please turn to your listening guide inside your bulletin. (*Listening guide can be found at the end of the sermon.*)

First, work allows us to support ourselves. **[slide: (photo of family eating dinner together): 1. Work allows us to support ourselves.]** This is an obvious but important point. Work puts a roof over our heads, food on the table, and clothes on our backs. Work pays for insurance, college tuition, and transportation. In short, work allows us to meet the basic material needs of life for ourselves and for our families. Read with me this verse from 2 Thessalonians, **[add to slide: “For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’” (2 Thess. 3:10 NIV)]** The Bible is clear. Unless we are disabled or retired, God expects us to work to support ourselves and our families.

Second, work allows us to serve others. **[slide: (photo of a cashier helping a customer) 2. Work allows us to serve others.]** Please read 1 Peter 4:10 with me, **[add to slide: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.” (1 Pet. 4:10 NIV)]** Although this passage speaks specifically about using our God-given gifts in service to God’s church, the same principle is true in all our work, paid and unpaid, including our regular jobs. I cannot think of any legitimate job that does not serve others in some way. Teachers educate children. Factory workers produce products that help people. Businesses and professionals provide services that are needed in our community, and on it goes. Virtually every job helps serve society in some way, and that’s an important part of working.

Ed understands this truth. Ed has a job with a city electric company. One of Ed’s duties is to repair the electric lines on stormy nights. Ed and his fellow workers often spend all night repairing the lines during and after a raging storm. When Ed goes out to work, lights are often off all over the city. But Ed goes out and works in spite of cold weather,

rainy weather, and snowy weather. One evening when Ed came home, he was soaking wet, chilled, and bone tired. His wife told him that she had been worried about him. Ed said, “Don’t worry about me. I’m OK. And besides, *I just love to see the lights come on.*” Ed doesn’t like everything about his job. But he likes the fact that it helps other people. He just loves to see the light come on. One of the great benefits of working is that through our work we can serve others; we can make contributions to our community. And Jesus made clear that when we serve others, we serve God.

Third, work allows us to feel productive. [slide: (photo of a carpenter building something): **3. Work allows us to feel productive.**] This passage from Proverbs 31 is about a hardworking woman. Verse 17 says, [slide: (photo of a woman working in a garden): **“She sets about her work vigorously.” (v. 17 NIV)**] And work she does. She buys and sells and sews and gardens and on and on. The text concludes by saying, [add to slide: **“Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.” (v. 31, NIV)**] This passage, along with others in the Bible, teaches us that hard work gives us a sense of honor and dignity. A real sense of accomplishment and self-respect comes from a job well done. A few blocks from our church on Oak Street, you have probably noticed a major construction project. For months now I’ve assumed it’s part of the Lebanon rail project, but I wasn’t sure. A few days ago I rode my bike past the construction site on my way to the park. As I rode past the site, I passed a worker. I stopped my bike and asked him what he was working on. His face just beamed. He smiled a big smile and said, “We are building a depot for the *Music City Star*, the passenger train that will take you all the way to downtown Nashville.” This man was obviously proud to be a part of such an important work project. You see, God created in every person a need and a desire to be productive. That’s part of what it means to be created in God’s image. Hard work, whether paid or volunteer, makes us feel productive, and that is one of the reasons God created work.

Forth, work allows us to be generous. [slide: (photo of offering plate being passed in a pew) **4. Work allows us to be generous.**] Read with me this passage from Ephesians, [add to slide: **“He. . . must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” (Eph. 4:28 NIV)**] We’ve already said that we work in order to meet the needs of ourselves and our families. But the Bible also teaches that we work in order to give of our resources to others. When we get our paychecks, God expects us to give some of it away. This is an important spiritual truth. One of the primary reasons God gave you and me a job is so we can be generous with our income. For example, God expects us to give generously to our church. Giving to our church is a great joy and privilege. It allows us to be part of something bigger than ourselves. It allows us to invest in kingdom work, locally and all over the world. Work also allows us to give to other good causes. For example, I financially support Habitat for Humanity, Bread for the World, and many other good institutions, as well as individuals who have special needs. [end slide]

I could go on, but these examples are enough to make the point: work is a good part of God’s creation! As we’ve seen today, [slide: (photo of woman physician at work with

a patient): 1. Work allows us to support ourselves. 2. Work allows us to serve others. 3. Work allows us to feel productive. 4. Work allows us to be generous.]

Since work is a good gift from God, we need to be grateful for it. I know that it's not always easy to be thankful for our jobs. Sometimes our jobs are boring or stressful or difficult. Every job has negatives, even the best jobs. But the reverse is also true. Every job has positives, even the worst jobs. Every job has some benefits, has something to be thankful for, even if it's just a paycheck. So on this Labor Day weekend, let us give thanks to God for the good gift of work.

LISTENING GUIDE

Why Work?

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Gen. 2:15 NIV)

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.” We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.” (2 Thess. 3:6-13 NIV)

1. Work allows us to _____

“For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’” (2 Thess. 3:10 NIV)

2. Work allows us to _____

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.” (1 Pet. 4:10 NIV)

3. Work allows us to _____

“She sets about her work vigorously. . . . Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.” (Prov. 31:17, 31)

4. Work allows us to _____

“He. . . must work, doing something useful with his own hand, that he may have something to share with those in need.” (Eph. 4:28 NIV)