

Read also Genesis 2:4-8, 15, 3:8, 13, 17-19. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Work was first begun upon creation of humans – work was easy.

The watering system was automatic. The sun, perfect. Plants grew readily. No mosquitos. At least in a perfect world, which it was, you would assume that bugs would not bite. All was pristine; unspoiled. No one gets tired. You get up in the morning and say, *I can't wait to rake!*

But then a snake messes up the whole thing and work has been hard ever sense. Work became like tunneling through a mountain. Obstacle after obstacle.

My father-in-law was a plumber who had a worker named Henry Tate. Henry dug the best ditches for sewer lines. He used to talk to himself. My husband remembers. He said, “Dig, Henry, dig!” “Dig, Henry, dig!” This song reflects that effort. You may know the song:

“Hard Working Man,” by Brooks and Dunn¹

*I'm a hard workin' man, I wear a steel hard hat
I can ride, rope, hammer and paint
Do things with my hands that most men can't
I can't get ahead no matter how hard I try
I'm gettin' really good at barely gettin' by!*

You know how it is: “When you wake up at 6 in the morning, you close your eyes for 5 minutes and it's already 6:45. When you're at work and it's 2:30, you close your eyes for 5 minutes and it's 2:31.” (anonymous, from funnyquotes.com)

Since the Fall, work has been hard, but we press on. “Dig, Henry, dig!”

It has not been any easier for women. Listen to this:

“Nine to Five,” by Dolly Parton

*Jump in the shower and the blood starts pumpin'
Out on the streets, the traffic starts jumpin'
For folks like me on the job from 9 to 5.*

*Workin' 9 to 5, what a way to make a livin',
Barely gettin' by, it's all takin' and no givin'.
They just use your mind and they never give you credit;
It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it!²*

¹ “Hard Working Man,” written by Ronnie Dunn, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcXg8Rry>, accessed July 18, 2017.

² “Nine to Five,” written by Dolly Parton, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwDMFOLIHxU>, accessed July 19, 2017.

Dolly Parton wrote those lyrics in 1980. What we don't know is that these feelings about the difficulties of work go way back. The Thessalonians struggled with it. Perhaps this anonymous quote originally came from them!

"I don't work on wɛɔkɛnds, or any othɛr day that ɛnds with "Y"." (from funnyquotes.com)

So let's read their story. READ 2 Thes. 3:6-15

And now, dear brothers and sisters, we give you this command in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Stay away from all believers who live idle lives and don't follow the tradition they 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 certainly had the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to give you an example to follow. Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: "Those unwilling to work will not get to eat." Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people's business. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. As for the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, never get tired of doing good. Take note of those who refuse to obey what we say in this letter. Stay away from them so they will be ashamed. Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as a brother.

Perhaps they just didn't want to work.

But Proverbs says: "Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones. Learn from their ways and become wise! Though they have no prince or governor or ruler to make them work, they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter. But you, lazybones, how long will you sleep? When will you wake up?" (6:6-9).

Solomon said, "Hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty!" (14:23).

You might think, the writer of Proverbs (Solomon) was a little harsh. Perhaps our friends in Thessalonica decided why work? The end is coming!

In 1938 it seemed like the end was coming. War was on everyone's mind. According to records, a professor told the College Council in Oxford that should an international emergency happen, perhaps university education should not continue. English Fellow C. S. Lewis was in on that conversation. In October, 1939, a month after England had declared war on Germany, Lewis, who was a World War One veteran, preached a sermon called "Learning in War-Time" at St. Mary the Virgin Church. That's the center from which the University of Oxford grew. The sermon centered around the question, "What is the use of beginning a task which we have so little chance of finishing?" In other words, the end is coming! "When the world is advancing to heaven or hell, when the liberties of Europe hang in the balance," Lewis wrote, "how can students and faculty spend time on what seem to be trivialities in comparison?"³

³ C. S. Lewis, "Learning in War Time" in *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 47-63. See also <http://www.cslewis.com/>, accessed July 19, 2017.

The larger issue is not learning in war-time, but to the Thessalonians the question was, “What is the use of working if the end is coming and we will not finish the task? Why not just take off, have a little snooze, and take life easy?”

Lewis argued this, and I believe it helps us understand Paul's argument about work:

If mankind had postponed the search for knowledge . . . until all of life was secure for everyone, the search would never have begun. There has never been a time when there were no crises, alarms, difficulties, and emergencies. And, after all, learning (or work) is part of our nature. In fact, no one can live a life exclusively devoted to war or, on the assumption that the spiritual life is most important, to religious activities. Even the person fully engaged in war is doing many things characteristic of normal life. Furthermore, to surrender oneself fully to a single cause, even one's country in the time of war, *is to remove that person from God.*

In other words, you've got to eat, you've got to drink, and wash the clothes. You've got to feed the dog and mow the lawn and take out the trash. In faith, you need to be a good neighbor.

Actually, Scripture does not ask us to set aside normal activities. Instead, the Bible invites the Christian to engage in normal activities, like work, and offer it to God:

- 1 Cor. 10:31 – “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”
- Rom. 14:23b – “Everything that does not come from faith is sin.”

Working is one of those normal and natural activities that can be offered to God. Lewis said, “The work of a Beethoven, and the work of a charwoman (cleaning lady), become spiritual on precisely the same condition, that of being offered to God, of being done humbly ‘as to the Lord.’” (p. 57)

When Israel was conquered and exiled and they were carried off to Babylon, and they didn't know how to get their bearings, God said this:

- Jeremiah 29:5-7 – “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

Work is God's plan for you. What if you are retired? God's policy is “If you are not dead, you are not done.” That's a direct quote! 😊

If you have made it to retirement, you have a wealth of experience and wisdom to share. Volunteer. Get involved in the community. Bless it. Pray to the Lord for it. For if it prospers you too will prosper.

Solomon said, “Despite their desires, the lazy will come to ruin, for their hands refuse to work” (Pr. 21:25). And for the woman who works, “Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate” (Pr. 31:31).

No matter your age, "Honor the LORD with your wealth, [that is gained from your work, whether that is knowledge or financial gain, keep giving] –with the firstfruits of all your crops; then [you will be blessed, as will others by your generosity] –your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine" (Pr. 3:9-10).

For after all, in the beginning, "God blessed [Adam and Eve] and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground" (Genesis 1:28).

God never said, "Retire." *Are you contributing?*

It is God's will that society works well, that cities and towns are built, children are educated, people are fed, and that everyone makes a contribution. Do you remember the story of Babel? All the people gathered in one place. They refused to go out. But God came down, confused their language and scattered them throughout the earth. We have work to do. Therefore, *heigh ho, heigh ho, it's off to work I go!*

Hard Working Man (2:01-2:56 secs)

Come Monday mornin' I'm the first to arrive,
I ain't nothin' but business from nine till five.
I'm a hard, hard workin man.
I got it all on the line for a peace of the promised land.

AMEN

Genesis 2:4-8, 15 ⁴ This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens-- ⁵ and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, ⁶ but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground-- ⁷ the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. ⁸ Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. . . . ¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Genesis 3:8, 13, 17-19 ⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. . . . ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" . . . ¹⁷ And to the man he said, "Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. ¹⁸ It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return."