

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

May 1, 2022

Keep The Change

“Earn Dilligently”

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

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Did you ever approach your mom or your dad and ask them for money or to buy you something you really wanted and then you heard this answer, “Money doesn’t grow on trees, you know.”? One little boy, after hearing his grandmother tell him that money doesn’t grow on trees, he said, “Oh, grandma, I know money doesn’t grow on trees. It comes outta that ATM machine at the mall.” I’m sure that most of us would love to have a money tree in our backyard that never runs out, but we all know the reality is most of the time earning money requires diligent effort on our part. The Bible tells us God expects us to join Him in His great work in this world and as we serve God through our work, we will earn a living, flourish, and be a blessing to this world. Let’s hear words along this line from God:

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

⁶ And now, dear brothers and sisters, we give you this command in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Stay away from all believers^[a] who live idle lives and don’t follow the tradition they received^[b] from us. ⁷ For you know that you ought to imitate us. We were not idle when we were with you. ⁸ We never accepted food from anyone without paying for it. We worked hard day and night so we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We certainly had the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to give you an example to follow. ¹⁰ Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: “Those unwilling to work will not get to eat.”

¹¹ Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people’s business. ¹² We command such people and urge them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and work to earn their own living. ¹³ As for the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, never get tired of doing good.

¹⁴ Take note of those who refuse to obey what we say in this letter. Stay away from them so they will be ashamed. ¹⁵ Don’t think of them as enemies, but warn them as you would a brother or sister.^[c]

WARNING AGAINST LAZINESS

Apparently, there was a problem in the church in Thessalonica which came to the Apostle Paul’s attention. In Paul’s previous letter to the church that we call 1

Thessalonians, Paul addressed the problem of some members of the church who refused to get a job and work. Paul urged them to get to work and not depend on others to take care of them. Unfortunately, some of the people did not heed Paul's direction and still would not work which resulted in others having to take care of them. Please note that Paul was not referring to those in the congregation who were not able to work due to maybe physical challenges they might have or to those who were elderly. Paul was speaking to able-bodied persons who were shirking their responsibility to carry their own weight which then made them a burden to those who were working hard earning a living and now having to support them. Paul points out these people lived idle lives, did nothing productive with their lives. The only thing they really did well was to meddle in other people's lives. Paul called them lazy and even said, if you don't work, you don't eat. Yes, the church is to be compassionate to those who are not able to take care of themselves, but to those who are and do not, the church is not to encourage them to continue doing so by codependently taking care of them when they refuse to take care of themselves. Paul even goes as far as to call people who are able to do so and do not earn their own living as being lazy.

Did you know the world champion "couch potato" is a Canadian man by the name of Suresh Joachim. Joachim broke the *Guinness Book of World's Record's* previous mark for the longest time spent watching TV by more than 1 hour to set a new world record of 121 hours 18 minutes of just watching TV without basically doing anything else and even without any sleep. The rules were he was allowed a 5-minute break every hour and a 15-minute break each 8 hours—all the rest of that time he had his eyes on the screen. Joachim's record superseded that set by Ashish Sharma in India, who spent 120 hours 23 minutes, watching 48 movies. I would say that is taking binge-watching to a radical extreme and not the kind of productivity for which you want to be known. *Proverbs 18:9* says this about how harmful it is to be lazy, "*A lazy person is as bad as someone who destroys things.*". Also, *Proverbs 10:4-5* tells us, "*4 Lazy people are soon poor; hard workers get rich. 5 A wise youth harvests in the summer, but one who sleeps during harvest is a disgrace.*" One more passage in *Ecclesiastes 10:18* wisely states, "*Laziness leads to a sagging roof; idleness leads to a leaky house.*" We will reap the consequences of living an idle, lazy life.

WORKING WITH GOD

Instead, though, the Apostle Paul calls God's people to be characterized as those who roll up our sleeves and serve God by working to earn our own living. God expects us to make money through hard work. Even though the Apostle Paul was trained to be a Jewish rabbi, he had also been taught the trade of tentmaking. Evidently, every Jewish rabbi was taught a practical trade. This was so important that the Jews once had a proverb that said something to the effect of, "He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him to steal." Later, as a Christian, while Paul was busy with preaching the gospel and planting new churches, he was also working as a tentmaker, earning enough money to buy food and lodging, and taking care of not only his needs but also the needs of those assistants with which he traveled. Paul could have rightly been taken care of by the churches he served but he wanted to be an example to the churches of a

good work ethic and didn't want to be a burden to them, even though he taught the churches they should take care of their leaders. Paul then called on the Thessalonian church to follow his example and work hard to take care of themselves and their families, to not be a burden to the churches, and to help those who cannot take care of themselves. That is the expectation God has for us and is what we call the Christian work ethic.

This work ethic did not just start with Paul but can be traced all the way back to the beginning of time. Just after God created the world He turned to Adam and Eve and this is what happened in *Genesis 1:28*, ²⁸ *Then God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.'* God created humanity in His image to be like Him and as such God turned all of creation over to us and said, fill it with humanity, and oversee and govern it, work it, and make it as productive as possible to take care of all your needs. God gave Adam and Eve the blessing of work which was meant to give us purpose and the ability to develop the full potential of all the resources God has given us. Work was meant to be a blessing and not a curse. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of sin entering the world turned work into labor, meaning hard work became necessary to make a living, for creation to be able to produce fruit.

But there is good news in that God, through Jesus, has come to redeem our work. As Christians, our work has value beyond just making money. Our work now becomes our vocation, our calling by which we earn a living and serve God in that work. Jesus said to His disciples in *John 14:12*, ¹² *"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father."* Jesus has given us the calling to serve God with our lives in this world and as we serve God, doing His great work as an attorney, a judge, a doctor, a nurse, a teacher, a pastor, a plumber, a politician, an entertainer, an athlete, an artist, an administrator, a stay-at-home parent, a builder, a business owner, a retail worker, a waitress or a cook, or wherever we work, we are serving God and continuing the work we were given in *Genesis* and that Jesus passed on to us. We now not only can enjoy the fruit of our labors, but even more so, our work has much greater meaning, purpose, and value as our work is a means by which we serve God, and can make a difference in this world as we work like *Colossians 3:23* instructs us to do, ²³ *Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people."*

Storyteller Megan McKenna, in her book entitled, "Parables: The Arrows of God", has created a wonderful parable pointing us to God's expectation of our work and the potential we have in producing great wealth, not only for ourselves, but for the world. She writes saying, "There was a woman who wanted peace in the world and peace in her heart, but she was very frustrated. The world seemed to be falling apart. She would read papers and get depressed. One day she decided to go shopping, and she went into a mall and picked a store at random. She walked in and was surprised to see Jesus behind the counter. She knew it was Jesus, because he looked just like the pictures she'd seen on holy cards and devotional pictures. She looked again and again at him, and finally she got up her nerve and asked, 'Excuse me, are you Jesus?' 'I am.' 'Do you

work here?' 'No,' Jesus said, 'I own the store.' 'Oh, what do you sell here?' 'Oh, just about anything!' 'Anything?' 'Yeah, anything you want. What do you want?' She said, 'I don't know.' 'Well,' Jesus said, 'feel free, walk up and down the aisles, make a list, see what it is you want, and then come back and we'll see what we can do for you.' She did just that, walked up and down the aisles. There was peace on earth, no more war, no hunger or poverty, peace in families, no more drugs, harmony, clean air, careful use of resources. She wrote furiously. By the time she got back to the counter, she had a long list. Jesus took the list, skimmed through it, looked up at her and smiled. 'No problem.' And then he bent down behind the counter and picked out all sorts of things, stood up, and laid out the packets. She asked, 'What are these?' Jesus replied, 'Seed packets. This is a catalog store.' She said, 'You mean I don't get the finished product?' 'No, this is a place of dreams. You come and see what it looks like, and I give you the seeds. You plant the seeds. You go home and nurture them and help them grow and someone else reaps the benefits.' 'Oh,' she said. And she left the store without buying anything." The potential for every one of our lives of what can be produced is only limited by our willingness to roll up our sleeves and go to work in serving God in the calling that He has given each one of us.

While the Apostle Paul calls on us to follow His example, I know Paul would agree that the greatest example to follow, the same one Paul was following, is to follow Jesus' example. Jesus once said in *John 4:34*, "³⁴ *My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work.*" Jesus selflessly served God and as a result we are offered God's grace and given the privilege of serving alongside of God.

Icebreaker I – What are some of the most memorable phrases you have heard about money? Work ethic? Idle hands?

Icebreaker II – What is the longest you've ever "binge-watched" TV? What were you watching?

1. What was your first paid job? How long or hard did you work at it? What did you do with your money?
2. What model does Paul leave for the others to follow?
3. What does this have to do with taking responsibility?
4. Are you willing to plant seeds, nurture them and help them grow for someone else to reap the benefits?
5. Are you idle, a busy-body, a worrywart, or a workaholic? What is God's message to you in 2 Thessalonians?
6. How is it with your soul?
7. What are your struggles and successes?
8. How might the Holy Spirit and Scriptures be speaking in your life?
9. How can this group pray for you this week?