



Working Hard Or Hardly Working?

by
Tony Salerno

Many people are afraid to work. They're afraid of the very idea of it. Just thinking about it can ruin their whole day. It's practically a curse word of the 20th century. But we're going to have to discuss it anyway because the Bible has many things to say about the subject of...WORK!

There is a very beautiful portion of Scripture in I Chronicles 29 where David talks about the preparations his son would need to build God's house. It records David's challenge to the people to contribute their work and riches. In the fifth verse David asks a question to the entire assembly. God asks us that same question today, *"And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" (KJV)*

Did you know that work was a mandate declared to man from the very beginning? Genesis 1:28 says, *"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."* (NASB) Gustav Ohler said, "Man like God, is to work and rest, thus human life is to be a copy of divine life."

God created for six days, rested on the seventh day, and then began to work again. I think we get the idea that God worked, and now He's resting for all eternity. Some folks think we should do the same, work a few days and then relax for the rest of our lives. But that was never God's plan.

Idleness - The Devil's Workshop

We must admit that laziness is sin. That's hard for some to admit, but say it out loud, "Laziness is sin." Now if you said that, all the witnesses in heaven, the angels, and God have heard your statement, and it's going to be recorded in heaven.

Ezekiel 16:49 says, *"Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom."* I know what some of you are thinking, "I know what their sin was, it was..." But the Bible surprises us by saying, *"Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy."* (Ezek. 16:49 NASB)

There is a sense of accomplishment in working hard that never comes to the lazy person, because a lazy person is not functioning according to God's plan. Your body, mind, and emotions were designed for hard work, and will break down without it. Work has proven to be a great therapy for many kinds of problems. It's one of the great healers.

Sick Of Being Sick

A young lady I knew was constantly sick. She was always in bed for some illness or another. No matter how often she went to the doctor, or how much she was encouraged by others, she couldn't seem to overcome her frequent illnesses.

One day she moved to a place that required her to work very hard. She had to get up early in the morning for chores. She had to work full, hard days. The harder she worked the more things started to change in her life.

I received a letter from her that said, "Something has happened in my life that is so amazing, so thrilling, I can't begin to tell you." She continued on, "For years I had a history of illness and sickness but it's all gone! I am totally healthy. I feel strong and have energy I've never had before."

I couldn't believe it was the same girl, and wondered what in the world happened to her. Did she meet the man she was going to marry? That wasn't it. You know what happened? It was WORK! The harder she worked the better she felt. I wonder how many people are really sick because they have not followed through on God's command to work.

The Missing Ingredient

Many religious colleges today say, "Come to our school and we'll develop the whole person. We'll develop you spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially." They offer classrooms for the mental, fellowship for the social, outreach and chapels for the spiritual. But when it comes to the physical development, what does it involve? Usually it's recreation and some form of exercise, but rarely does it involve "hard work." We've missed God's purposes in using work to train disciples.

This country was founded upon some very godly principles, one of which was hard work. Benjamin Franklin, who put together the fire department, the

militia, the library, the wood burning stove, and the bifocals (just to name a few of his inventions), had some wonderful little sayings about work: "No man ere was glorious who was not laborious." "Trouble springs from idleness, toil from ease." "Oh, lazy bones! Do you think that God would have given you arms and legs if He had not designed that you should use them?"

Wanting to hear some modern day proverbs about work, I asked one of my classes to compose some modern sayings on work so that we could encourage each other. They were very creative: "Work is only hard to those who hardly work" - that's pretty exciting, isn't it? "Salt from the sweat of work preserves the soul." "The deepest sleep and the greatest rest comes to those who

work the hardest." "Work with complaining lasts for hours, while cheerful labor passes in minutes." "Bitter to taste is the fruit of the sluggard and his children eat it daily." "To master the art of work is to master the art of life." And I really like this one, "Is God worth your work?"

Your Witness - Up In Smoke?

Proverbs 10:26 says, *"A lazy fellow is a pain to his employers, like smoke in their eyes and vinegar that sets the teeth on edge."* (LB) If you've been lazy on the job, I'm afraid this Scripture is describing you. You may say, "I want to be a witness at work," but you never *work*, you just talk about Jesus. Well, you're nothing more than smoke in your employer's eyes.

Our definition of work today is distorted. When we say work we usually mean putting in time. It doesn't mean, *do* anything, it just means putting in time to receive money. That's what many think work is. Put in less and less time for more and more money. Part of this is a desire for more pleasure and ease - the sin which destroyed Sodom.

So, how should we work? David says in I Chronicles 29:2, *"I have prepared with all my might for the House of my God."* (KJV) How did he prepare? With all his might. So how should you work? Hard! Strenuously! You should work with all your might. That is Christian work, my friend. At the end of each day can you say, "I've worked with all my might, I have worked as hard as I could today." That's the way God wants us to work.

Put To Shame

One day I was driving past some students who were out on a work assignment. We had just trimmed some trees and they were supposed to be picking up the fallen limbs and loading them onto a truck. They were doing something - but it certainly was *not* work! It was just filling in time.

The job should have been done in a day, or two at the most. It was so interesting to watch these young men. Of course, when they saw me they started to move a little faster. But even after they saw me, their pace was still very slow. They'd walk over, find a branch (they'd look for a nice small one), reach down and pick it up, walk over to the truck and throw it on.

I wondered, "How long will this go on?" I drove away after several minutes and thought, "Boy! Do they ever have a lot to learn about work!" I came back the next day, and to my surprise, the same scene was being replayed. This went on three, four, five days. It didn't look like *any* tree limbs were being removed from the ground. I couldn't believe how long this job was taking!

But an interesting thing happened. One of our mobile evangelism teams pulled onto the grounds one morning to rest and recover from a recent outreach. It was a girls' team. At lunch the team leader approached me, "Tony, we're here for the week. We're going to rest, but is there some work we can do around the place?" Isn't that an interesting way to rest?

She said, "We've been out ministering and our minds are very tired, and emotionally we're drained. We need this rest to have time in the Word and in prayer, and we'd also like to do some manual labor. Can we work anywhere?" I said, "Well, we're trying to plant some grass in an area that is covered with dead limbs. We've got some guys out there, but I guess they need help or something. Would you girls mind going out there and helping them?" "Oh, no," they said, "that would be exciting."

Later, I came by and was amazed to see these girls running everywhere; they'd load themselves up with tree limbs, and run with them to the truck. They cleared the whole place out that afternoon.

That evening one of the guys from the class came up to me and said, "There are a number of us that want to talk to you. Today something happened. There were these girls who were working along side of us that showed us we're pretty lazy. We were so embarrassed this afternoon. We want to apologize. Now we know that to please God means you work with all your might, and that's not what we've done." There was a real change in those guys. Employers everywhere are crying out for people who will work. Let's begin to work in such a way that brings glory to God, and blesses our employer.

Cheerful, Willing, And Careful

You should not only do your work, but do it cheerfully. In other words my friends - whistle while you work! Be grateful that God has given you work to do, and realize that it's Him you serve as you work for others. *"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward"* (Col. 3:23-24 NASB)

It also pleases God when men and women offer themselves willingly. Don't just work and say, "Well, I have to work because God told me to." Or say, "Oh, I have to work." No! You should realize that when God asks you to do something, it is for your good, and the good of God and others. He loves you tremendously and is never trying to take advantage of you. Thinking this through helps me to work willingly.

Some of you work hard, but when you finish working things are in worse shape than before you started. You may have cleaned your parents' car, but you also removed the paint.

My folks made me work hard as a part of my training growing up, but I never liked to work. One time when I was about ten or eleven, my parents left me home alone for the afternoon. They were going to be home that evening and so I thought I would surprise them by working.

In trying to find a suitable project I looked out over our large back yard. We had a big fence which was covered with beautiful rose vines, but underneath the rose bushes were these weeds about three feet tall. I decided to tear out those weeds, and work the soil until all you could see was fresh dirt, all raked out nicely. I hoed and shoveled and raked all day, and couldn't wait to see the surprised look on my parents' faces when they saw the wonderful job I'd done. Well, my folks got back when it was dark, so they couldn't see what I had done, but I knew they would the next morning, and I would get a reward or something.

The next morning I was in my room when I heard my mom go outside, and then I heard my mom scream. I went running outside and said, "Mom, Mom, what's the matter?" She said, "What happened to all my chrysanthemums?" I said, "What chrysanthemums?" She said, "All my lovely chrysanthemums that were all along the back fence. They were just getting ready to bloom. I've been nurturing those plants for so long!" And I said, "You mean all those tall weeds?" "They weren't tall weeds!" I found that although my heart was right in wanting to bless my parents, I hadn't been very careful in finding out what was a blessing. So, be very careful when you work.

Be Thorough

These days no one wants to finish the job. Your parents may ask you to do something Young lady, I want you to clean up the kitchen." Instead of saying, "Yes, Mother, I'll do it right away," what is your normal response? Is it something like, "Well, what exactly do you want me to do, Mom?" She says, "What do you mean what do I want you to do? I want you to go clean the kitchen." "Well, what part of it, Mom?" "What do you mean what part of it? There's dishes in the sink and the floor needs sweeping, you know, clean the kitchen."

When your mom comes back, the dishes in the sink are clean, and the floor's swept; but there are dishes on the oven and the table. Mom says, "Why didn't you clean the table?" And you say, "Well, Mother, you didn't tell me to clean the table, you told me to..." How many times have you done something like that? Do you think that's pleasing to God? That's not work; that's being slothful, or what the Bible calls a sluggard. If you work like this, you don't know what a terrible habit pattern you're developing for your life.

The Extra Mile

To really work is to do the job even when you're not asked to. The rest of the employees on the job may leave their work place a mess, but you're not the rest of the employees, you're an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ! You represent Him wherever you are, whether working or playing. God is looking for people who are willing to go the "extra mile" in whatever they're asked to do.

One of our students who was preparing to speak in his class the next day, stopped by a truck stop close to our school to do his studying. But he did a strange thing. He went in the bathroom with a pair of scissors and gave himself a little haircut. This probably would have been fine if he had cleaned up after himself, but he left hair all over the floor.

Well, the next thing I knew, the lady who owned the restaurant had called our place and was furious. She found the hair and assumed that the student who left it must also have been the person who had written graffiti on the walls of the bathroom.

She started saying that Agape Force people are destructive of other people's property, dirty, and lazy people. What an indictment against a whole ministry because of what one young man did! I asked this student's leader what he did with the young man. He said, "Well, I asked the young man to go back and apologize," and I said, "Did he do that?" and he said, "Yes he did." But I said, "You know, that's not enough." How many of you know that's not enough? How many of you know that an apology sometimes doesn't undo damage that's been done? Some people would rather talk negatively than accept an apology. So I called the young man into my office and I tried to share with him how damaging the thing he had done was, and how his actions misrepresented the Lord Jesus.

At first he didn't understand all that I was saying, but then he started to. Finally I said, "I think you need to do something to show that lady that you really are sorry. I think you need to go back and tell her you're sorry, and that you'll make up for it by working for her four hours a day for the next week." At first he said, "What?" But as we discussed it more, about how he damaged the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and of our ministry, giving occasion for someone to blaspheme God, he said, "You're right." He was a very tender young man and he started to weep and said, "I've done such a terrible thing."

So, he went to the restaurant and spoke to the lady. He said, "Lady, I know I apologized already but I'm really sorry, and I'm gonna work for you four hours today, and every day this week to make up for what I've done." She said, "Oh, no, no, no, son. I accept your apology. That's fine, thank you. I appreciate it. Just don't mess up our restaurant next time." He said, "No, ma'am, I'm gonna work." He found an apron to wear and started to work.

It was kind of a "greasy spoon" so he cleaned very strenuously for four hours. When he came home he felt great. He went back the next day. "Well, here I am to work," he said to the lady. She said, "Now hold it just a minute, son. This is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard of." She said, "You've already done more than enough, your apology was enough, and then you worked for an afternoon . . . you can't do this. I feel so guilty! I mean, son, it was just a little bit of hair." Well, the way she had talked to the neighbors you'd have thought King Kong shaved himself bald in that bathroom. But the young man

replied, "No, ma'am, I'm going to work."

She got so bothered that she said, "Son, if you're gonna work, then you're gonna do what I tell you to do." And he said, "Alright."

She said, "Here are the keys to my car. Take my car (it was a new car, and she was giving it to a young man she didn't even know very well) and go pick up my son from high school, and on the way home, do you think you could share with him about Jesus? I want my son to be like you. You people down there, you're good people." You see what work will do, what kind of a testimony it will be?

The Work Of An Ambassador

One of our ministry teams pulled into a restaurant they like to eat at. They usually don't get to eat out, but they had no place to cook, and so they went to a McDonald's. After they were through eating they cleaned up their little booth, and they also took a few extra minutes to clean up the other tables that had trash on them.

Well, the next night they finished work and did the same thing. The third night as they pulled into McDonald's, the manager came running out of the restaurant and said, "Who are you people, and where are you from?" - like they were from space or something.

They were able to share their testimony and witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. When they were through the man said to them, "I've never seen people like you before, you leave the place cleaner than before you came." He said, "I want to tell you something. Tonight the meal is on McDonald's." My question to you, my friends, is when was the last time someone said to you, "The meal is on McDonald's"? I trust you understand what I'm talking about.

We've had young men stay in apartments - eight and ten guys at a time - and receive back beautiful letters from the landlords and neighbors. Two months after one group of young men had stayed in an apartment complex, they received a letter from the landlord (a non-Christian man) which said, "We really miss you guys, we wish you were back here. In fact, all the tenants miss you. You brought such a joy and a happiness to this whole apartment complex. You left the place cleaner than when you came in, and we would be guilty if we took your rent. I have to send your rent back." He enclosed the rent for their last few months because he said, "You have more than paid us with your lives."

How long has it been since you represented Jesus that way? Do you care that others may not want to have anything to do with Jesus because of the way you work? Your parents may look at you and say, "If Jesus is like you, I want nothing to do with Him."

Conclusion

The great evangelist Dwight L. Moody said that he never met a lazy Christian. He didn't believe there was such a thing. And I quote from him, "It is observable that God has often called men to places of dignity and honor when they have busy and honest employment of their vocation. Saul was seeking his father's donkeys and David his father's sheep when called to the Kingdom. The shepherds were feeding their flocks when they had their glorious revelation. God called the four apostles from their fishing and Matthew from collecting taxes, Amos from the horsemen of Tecoa, Moses from keeping Jethro's sheep, Gideon from the threshing floor, Elisha from the plows. God never called a lazy man. God never encourages idleness and will not despise persons in the lowest employment."

So I present it to you again, "Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?"

Tony Salerno is the co-author of the manual "Life In Christ" and a teacher of Christian principles which encourage the development of godly character and high moral standards. He has also produced a number of well known children's albums, including "The Music Machine" and "Bullfrogs and Butterflies." Tony and his wife Kathy live in California with their son, Anthony.

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