



2024 Weekly Devotions

Week of: January 15th - 21st

Sermon: January 14th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

January 15

Genesis 2:2

I want to explore two related topics this week, work, and rest. Admittedly, one of the subjects is seen in a negative light by many in our society and the other is exploited but my hope is to see that both are necessary for a balanced, God-honoring, Christ-exalting lifestyle.

As we dive into our devotions for the week, I want to begin with a basic assertion: work is a good thing! How do I know that it is good? The answer is twofold, first I know that it is good because God does it! Today's text tells me that God "rested from His work" on the seventh day. The clear, and inescapable, implication of the text is that God worked! To be clear, His work is not like our work. He did not exert Himself physically (He has no physical body) and His work wasn't frustrated like ours (more on that later) but this does not change the fact that work is associated with God's being. He is a worker!

The second reason why we know that work is good is because God commands it. You will notice in Genesis 1:28 that God commands mankind to work. The dominion mandate is given to man to inform the reason and purpose behind his existence. Stated simply, God created man to rule over His creation as His representatives (those who are made in His image) and this ruling required mankind to exert himself, physically, mentally, and emotionally, and this exertion is what we call work! The necessity of work to fulfill God's mandate is confirmed in the directive to "subdue" the earth which is further defined in Genesis 2:5 when the Bible says that God had not caused it to rain before His creation of man because "there was no man to work the ground". Putting these things together, it is clear that part of God's design was for man to subdue the earth, bringing it to beauty and functionality through working and we know this because God did not allow rain to cause growth until He created man to work to bring beauty and order to the growth that would occur.

As we combine these two sentiments, that God is a worker and that God commands mankind to work, we see that work is a good thing! In fact, the Bible says that God looked at His creation, after each day of His own work, and saw that it was "good". It was "good" that creation came to be, and it was good that creation was designed for mankind to work.

This is important because some folks see work as a necessary evil. They believe that it is something negative that has befallen us, but the order of the text is important. We certainly don't deny that the world is a broken place, we absolutely affirm the Bible's teaching that work is more difficult and often frustrated in our cursed world, but we do not therefore agree that work itself is bad. Work existed before sin, in a world that God says is very good. This means that we, as Christians, must embrace work as a fundamental reason for our existence. We must see in our work, the fulfilling of our commission to subdue and work the proverbial ground of creation. When you steward your skills for order and prosperity amongst the people, when you take the time to mow the grass and rake the leaves, you are subduing and beautifying the world that God created. In these things, your vocation and your free time, your efforts and labors are a function of your design. So, dear Christian, see work not as evil but as a good and important purpose of your very lifestyle and understand that the lazy and the sluggards among us are not "getting away" with a lifestyle of leisure, they are operating in direct opposition to their Creator and missing out on a foundational purpose for their very being.

January 16

Colossians 3:23 & 1 Corinthians 10:31

Today's devotion is going to begin an attempt to answer the burning question that lurks in each of our souls as we hear a command or instruction that some of us might not immediately enjoy. It is a question I hear often, in my home, when I give my kids instructions to clean their room, or work to fulfill some other mandate, the question is "why"? We all want to know not only what we should be doing but why we should be busy doing it! To be clear, I do not believe that God owes us an answer to every question but in this case, we are given many reasons why industriousness is important.

The first passage tells us that even our work is for the "Lord". When you and I fulfill our duties in our vocation, our ultimate hope is not that our boss would be pleased or that we would receive a rise in compensation, our hope is that God would be glorified. How? Because He has made us work and when we use our gifts and strength for this purpose, He is honored. We have taken the good gifts we have been given and used them for the very reason He has entrusted them to us.

This motivation transcends circumstance and any secondary obstacle. Folks, in life sometimes your boss will be less than stellar and may of your co-workers will be lost, your job may well be unfulfilling or menial and you may not make the money you desire but none of these secondary considerations (which do matter by the way), impact the ultimate goal of work which is the Lord's honor and commendation. You don't show up to a job to make your boss proud or to win the affirmation of your co-workers (although both often come to those who work diligently), you work for God's approval alone.

This brings me to the second text in which Paul tells the Corinthians that there is a way to bring God glory in "all things". God, evidently, has made it possible to glorify Him as we work. How? Through our attitude that reflects the hope of Gospel reward. Through peace that reflects our conviction that He will provide for us in our labors. Through diligence that denotes our submission to the authority of our true Sovereign in heaven who has commanded us to work. Through a righteous lifestyle that does not wrongly take from our employer and that works to honor God both in word and action as we work as a fleshly embodiment of His grace. In all these things, work becomes a primary means that we worship God in obedience.

Additionally, it is important to note that we glorify God in our work for evangelistic purposes as well. When people see the difference that Christ makes in our attitude and actions, they recognize a distinction. While they will not know where our hope lies without words, it is entirely possible, dare I say probable, that an exemplary, diligent co-laborer who is filled with hope and purpose outside of the motivations that are so common in our secular world, will draw questions and drum up conversations as people ask us for the hope that lies within us (1 Peter 3:15). Our lives are an apologetic, testifying of hope that the world knows not and this includes the quality of our work.

January 17

Proverbs 14:23

Perhaps you read yesterday's devotion and thought, "Pastor, that sounds nice, it may make sense in your office but, I need a more practical reason for work than God's glory". If that is you, I would offer two responses: first, there is nothing more practical than the existence of God and our duty to honor Him as such. In all sincerity, if you feel this way, there are real issues at the heart level that should be worked out. We have been created by God for His glory (Isaiah 43:7; Revelation 4:11) and this means that bringing God glory is the ultimate reason for our being (1 Corinthians 6:20). If that doesn't motivate you, perhaps the problem lies within. Second, the Bible does give us some additional, more materially focused, reasons for work and one such reason is in our verse from Proverbs that informs today's devotion.

Stated succinctly, we work for provision and, dare I say, prosperity. Now, I need to be clear here. We are not prosperity preachers at Smyrna! Pastor Robert and I do not believe that God promises wealth and health, nor do we believe that wealth is the primary motivator for diligence. Furthermore, we don't believe that we come to Christ for material blessings. A person exercises faith in Christ for the unique reward of knowing Christ and the hope-filled expectation that eternity with Jesus awaits. This life is sure to have difficulty and there is no reason that we should think we are the exceptions. That difficulty may be financial, and if it is, we can trust that God will see us through, providing for our needs even if our wants are left unmet. Nevertheless, we must recognize that the Proverbs were written for a reason and that reason is to give us wisdom. Specifically, Proverbs gives us wisdom regarding how God has created this world and what principles lead us to joy and abundance.

There is a grand difference between a promise and a principle. A promise is an unconditional guarantee. In the Bible, promises are numerous, and they are always, always, fulfilled. So, God promises to save all who believe on Christ alone for their salvation. God promises to be with His children, to never leave them nor forsake them. These promises (and many others) have no exceptions! God will save all who believe, God will never abandon His people.

Principles, on the other hand, are guiding directions that, generally speaking, lead to a specific outcome. There are many principles in life. We could say, for instance, that one who saves a substantial portion of his paycheck will be set up for comfort, from a financial perspective, later in life. We could argue that those who take care of their bodies with a proper diet and exercise live longer and the like. These principles are generally true, but there are exceptions! Many lost all their savings during the Great Depression, in shape people still sometimes die at a young age.

In the same way, Proverbs gives us a principle here and that principle is that those who are diligent are profitable. If you want to "get ahead" and enjoy God's good material gifts, the way forward is not laziness but diligence! Those who work hard will reap a reward of profit. This means that one of our motivations to get out of bed is to support ourselves and our families. We work so that we can eat and have shelter and the means to enjoy some of life's great gifts. Conversely, those who don't work should not expect such things. In fact, their life is often a life of misery and purposelessness with no prospect of improvement. Why? Because God has created the universe, He has ordained that people work, and He has constructed this world in such a way that those who do heed His command to work are generally rewarded and those who do not generally suffer the consequences.

January 18

2 Timothy 2:15

I will admit that I am guilty of a bit of a false distinction when I consider the topic of work. Typically speaking, I associate “work” with physical toil. To be clear, laboring in fields or on job sites or on loading docks is most certainly work, however the biblical category of work is far more expansive. Work includes physical exertion and mental strain and some kinds of work require more of one than the other. Today’s passage reminds us that work is not only required at our 9 to 5; it is also required in our study of the Scriptures.

To be totally transparent, I am afraid that many in the church today have fallen victim to spiritual lethargy creating, dare I say it, a lazy and ignorant church. We have bought the lie that difficult concepts and hard passages are somehow beyond our grasp and our responsibility, but this is simply not the case! Instead, the Bible is clear about two, cohesive truths: first, understanding the Bible can be hard and second, God expects us to work hard so that we can understand it!

Today’s passage teaches this truth with unmistakable clarity. Paul is admonishing Timothy, his protégé, to be diligent in his study of the Word. Now, to be contextual, Paul is speaking to a minister of the Word who is expected to stand to teach God’s Word publicly to the church. Nevertheless, we know from other Scriptures like the Great Commission in Matthew 28 that Christ expected all of His disciples to teach the truth to others on a personal, if not corporate, level. This means that the exhortation to study to rightly divide (or present the truth of God’s Word accurately) the truth applies to all of us.

Notice here that Paul calls the student of the Word of God a “worker”. The point is as obvious as it is important, studying the Bible is work! Work requires exertion and presents difficulties and is ongoing. When we sit to study the Bible, do we have a worker’s mentality? When you show up to your job or when you begin the day with your responsibilities don’t you understand that there will most likely be challenges and that they must be overcome? Of course, you do! My wife knows that her calling as a mother and educator of our children is not always easy, in fact it is quite hard, but she buckles down and teaches anyway! Why? Because this is what work requires. The individual who works shift work in a manufacturing plant knows that shutdowns are long and arduous but that doesn’t stop him from his work! He must press on. However, when it comes to Bible study, so many of us seem to accept this idea that if things are too challenging, we have the freedom to simply walk away.

My dear brother and sister, this is not a God-honoring attitude. We are not free to study until we are challenged, we must work hard at understanding. Obviously, God has given the church preachers and teachers to help us. Clearly, we live in a day with many great resources at our disposal that help us understand and reconcile all that we read but, at the end of the day, our daily spiritual discipline of Bible study takes work. I pray that this realization leads us to a mentality that mirrors our resolve when we walk into our place of employment. Though challenges may come, let us resolve to finish the WORK that Christ has given us in understanding and applying His Word to our lives.

January 19

2 Thessalonians 3:10

So, how big of a deal is this idea of work to God? Today's passage gives us a very clear answer as the Lord says that those who refuse to participate in the work are not to be fed by those who do work. As always, a bit of context is warranted. We know that the Thessalonian church was troubled by an onslaught of false teaching, specifically false teaching about the imminent return of Christ. Much of the book is dedicated to unveiling what is true about the Second Coming of Jesus and exposing the errors that had crept into the fellowship prior to Paul's writing.

What is interesting about Thessalonians (amongst other things) is the way that we see the results of poor theology on a people. It seems that some in the church had decided that the imminent return of Christ meant that they no longer needed to work. The "logic" was somewhat straightforward, if Jesus is coming any minute, why do I need to work for my future? The result was a group of lazy Christians who depended upon others, most likely in the church, for handouts.

As Paul hears about this, he feels the need to offer a statement of correction and, in doing so, he writes words that reveal God's disposition towards those who refuse to work on their own behalf. The statement is clear, if you do not work, you do not eat! Eating is necessary for life, so the penalty shows the gravity of the seriousness of our Lord. Our God is extremely intent on His people being a working people.

We see in this passage the necessity of work in the life of the Christian, and we also see the need for the church to discern real needs versus enablement. Some Christians are uncomfortable with this level of consequence. Isn't it inhumane not to give someone food? The answer is yes if that person cannot provide for himself. Obviously, there is a biblical category for the destitute and disabled, but that is not who Paul is addressing in our passage. While it is true that some people need assistance, it is equally true that it is the church's job to discern the difference between those in need and those looking for a handout. Those of you looking for a checklist for what qualifies as a "needy" person will be sorely disappointed. Instead, what I would offer to you as a rubric is the discernment that the Spirit gives His people. Life can be complicated, but most of the time people are able to do far more than they think with some encouragement and accountability. The larger principle, however, remains true. God desires and requires His people to work for their survival.

Those who see the severity of the penalty and balk should consider the severity of the sin in question and its penalty. If it's true, that God created us for work for His glory then it must be true that those who choose not to work are in sin AND that they have no hope of ever realizing the purpose for their creation which is to bring God glory through their gifts and abilities. Stated differently, the truly inhumane thing to do would be to allow a person to continue to waltz through life in sin before a holy, righteous, and clear God! The church is to be comprised of people who are fulfilling their calling to bring order to chaos and to leverage their abilities for the prosperity of mankind and the glory of our great God. Far be it from us to allow laziness to knock us off course, instead may we be fervent in good deeds which God ordained before our lives began for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10).

January 20

Exodus 20:8-11

We have taken the bulk of the week to discuss work, but we would be unbalanced if we did not dedicate a bit of time to the equally important command to rest. Genesis 1-2 gives us a marvelous template by which we are to order our lives. When life is lived well, there is a rhythm, a cadence if you will, that leads to our productivity and refreshment. In Genesis 1, God works for 6 days and to begin Genesis 2, we read that He rested. This rest was not because God was tired! He never tires, He has no need for rest, but it was to demonstrate the order of the creation He had made. While God is never weary, mankind is, and this means that the Sabbath principle (a rest in 7 days) is beneficial.

There are many reasons why this principle rings true, I'd like to give you two to consider today. First, rest is most meaningful when it is earned. The most precious, enjoyable, and meaningful time of recreation occurs after work has been completed. The sluggard knows very little about the joy of rest because he doesn't know what its like to be tired! He hasn't "earned" his down time, and this means that he has no category for enjoying and basking in rest. It is much better to put your feet up after a long 12-hour day to enjoy some reading or discussion than it is to stay in your chair all day doing nothing.

The second reason for rest is the reminder of the supreme nature of our God. If we are not careful, our intense labor can have an unfortunate impact on our thinking. We can be tempted to believe that we have what we are given because of our work! A rest in seven days is, amongst other things, a declaration of faith that God will provide even when we cease for a moment.

Some of you need to consider this truth. Overwork, the neglect of worship, rest and relaxation is as much a sin as laziness! Many work out of distrust. They simply don't believe that God will provide what they need and so they gobble up every hour of overtime and work diligently on every project with the idea that they are going to somehow buttress themselves against any kind of problem or trial. This is hogwash! While we are to work and while our labor does yield certain material rewards, every good gift comes from the Father, the same Father who has promised to take care of us.

Some people labor to distract themselves from more important considerations. I have met people who have worked 70–80-hour work weeks for years and this activity has allowed them to neglect their family, their church family and, most importantly, their God. You will not be commended in life if you are so busy in pursuit of mammon that you forget to pursue the Lamb! Rest gives us time to commune with God, to declare our dependence upon Him, to forge relationships with those in our care and to ensure that we are ready to get back to the grind when the time comes.

How does this look today? We would argue that the concrete nature of the command to observe the Sabbath (Saturday) as Christ has come to establish a New Covenant in which He is our rest. We do not cease our labors on Saturday, but this does not mean that we have totally ignored the creation order. Instead, we gather on Sundays to worship King Jesus, and we make this time a priority. Sometimes, this requires us to lay aside other obligations or things that need to get done but we do this in faith that what God requires of us will be seen and commended and He will provide all that we need when we cannot get to it ourselves. Furthermore, we believe that we should have a day of the week to cease from our vacations and worship the Lord as we spend time enjoying His creation and our families. In this way, we honor God by imitating His example and we confess our dependence upon Him by resting in His Sovereign Provision for us.

January 21

Matthew 11:28

Today's passage is a famous text in the book of Matthew. In it, Jesus promises "rest" to all those who would come upon Him. It is in this promise that we find the ultimate, most important, rest of all. There are some different theories about what Jesus means by rest, but they can all be nicely encapsulated in the statement that Jesus is offering rest from the labor of attempting to earn salvation by fulfilling the law.

We know that Christ came to fulfill the law and He did so in order to offer us His earned righteousness before God. Jesus was perfect in a way that we cannot be perfect, and His perfection is imputed to us by virtue of faith. This means that by faith we can be counted righteous before God which allows us to quit attempting to earn or merit salvation by our own works.

The world today is full of people who are trying to commend themselves both to man and God by their morality. I will be the first to admit that many of their moral standards are repugnant, nevertheless it is true that we live in a world that is constantly trying to signal individual virtue to the surrounding world. Why? Because man intuitively knows that there is a standard that he must live up to and, even more importantly, we all have this innate sense that we have fallen woefully short of measuring up!

The Gospel offer is one of rest from this rat race. When Jesus offers us rest, He is giving us security and assurance that we can be accepted into God's family. We can rest from our worry, rest from our law-keeping labor or self-salvation and simply... rest.

To be clear, we do not believe that this rest means we don't obey, instead we believe that we obey out of faith in God's future promises (namely that those who walk with Jesus will be blessed, ultimately to meet Him in heaven) and out of gratitude for what Christ has already done. This means that Christian obedience is not a burden but a joy. We are not worried that we might mess up and blow it. We are not concerned that we may get by-passed by a more pious individual who earns God's grace more abundantly. We are not worried that our work isn't going to be enough. Instead, we obey in faith that we are children of God, that our Father loves us and is pleased with us as He is pleased with Christ's sacrifice for us and that our lifestyle is an overflow of the joy that these realizations provide.

Have you experienced this rest today? Dear brother or sister, are you working out of joyful obedience to a good Father or are you working to earn your way or prove yourself to Him or to others? Is your work that of gratitude in making much of our great God and in celebration and stewardship of the gifts He has entrusted to you or is your work that of self-promotion and arrogance that claims that everything you currently have is nothing short of the fruit of your labor and effort alone? The difference is that which exists between laborious, legalistic, self-justifying labor and glorious, worshipful, and obedient rest. May you find and stay in the rest that Christ provides and may that be enough to motivate you to continue to pursue and honor the One who has given you all that you need for salvation and purpose forevermore.