

Useful Work as Christian Duty

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 2:15-25; Exodus 20:9; Nehemiah 6:3; John 5:17; 9:4; Acts 20:33-35; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12; Ephesians 4:28

Focus Scripture: Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:9; John 5:17; Acts 20:33-35; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

Key Verse: "In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Acts 20:35

GENESIS 2:15; EXODUS 20:9; JOHN 5:17; ACTS 20:33-35; 2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-12 (NRSV UE)

Genesis 2:15

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

Exodus 20:9

9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

John 5:17

17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father is still working, and I also am working."

Acts 20:33-35

33 "I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing.

34 You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions.

35 In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

6 Now we command you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister living irresponsibly and not according to the tradition that they received from us.

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not irresponsible when we were with you,

8 and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you.

9 This was not because we do not have that

GENESIS 2:15; EXODUS 20:9; JOHN 5:17; ACTS 20:33-35; 2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-12 (KJV)

Genesis 2:15

15 And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

Exodus 20:9

9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:...

John 5:17

17 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

Acts 20:33-35

33 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

9 Not because we have not power, but to

right but in order to give you an example to imitate.

10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

11 For we hear that some of you are living irresponsibly, mere busybodies, not doing any work.

12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

KEY TERMS

- **Idleness** – A term used in many scriptures to describe inappropriate lifestyles for God’s people. In this lesson, it refers to laziness and neglecting to work to meet one’s own needs.
- **Sabbath** – A concept based on God’s actions during creation. He formed the world in six days and rested on the seventh. It is a day dedicated to rest, worship, and reflection on our Sovereign God.

INTRODUCTION

How do you feel about the work you do each week? Whether it’s at home, school, a job, or volunteering, work means different

things to different people. Often, it’s more than just tasks. It’s part of how we define ourselves.

Today’s lesson examines why work is more than just a way to survive. It’s a calling, a vital

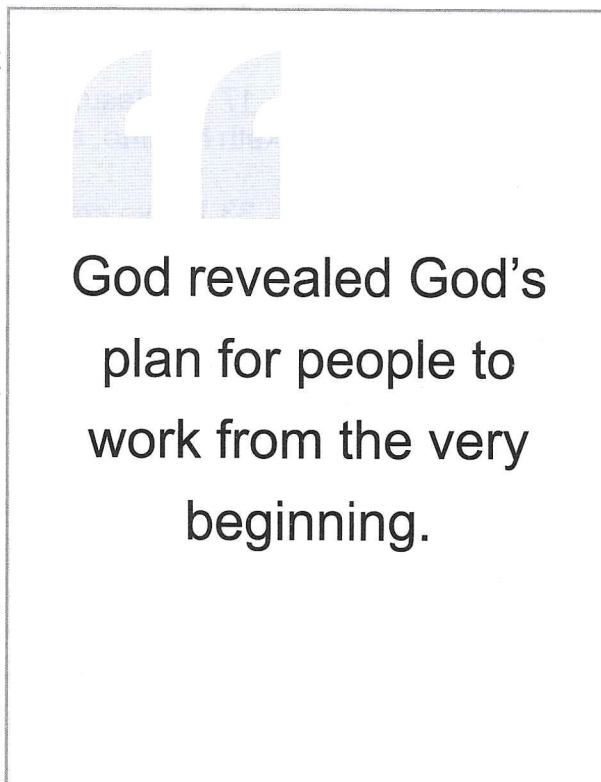
part of Christian life. Our topic, **Useful Work as Christian Duty**, helps us understand work from God’s point of view. It shows our faith, honors God, and puts love into action. In contrast, idleness is contrary to God’s purpose for our lives.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

God revealed God’s plan for people to work from the very beginning. In Exodus 20:9, we learn that God expects us to work six days and rest on the seventh. In John 5:17 and John 9:4, Jesus affirms God’s plan for us to work by explaining that both he and the Father are always working, and he urges his disciples to work diligently. The apostle Paul also encouraged believers to work earnestly, avoid la-

ziness, and seize opportunities to help others (2 Thessalonians 3 and Acts 20).

Work: A Part of God’s Plan for His People – Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:9



God's purpose for placing Adam in the garden of Eden was clear: "to till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Work was part of God's plan, not a punishment but a meaningful responsibility. When giving the Ten Commandments, God established a Sabbath (Exodus 20:9), calling his people to work six days and rest on the seventh. These passages show that work is a good gift, and rest is just as important. Both are given so that we may honor God.

Discipleship: Prioritizing God's Will – John 5:17; John 9:4

Both passages describe Sabbath healings that attracted criticism from Jewish leaders. In John 5:17, after healing a paralyzed man, Jesus responds by saying his Father is constantly working and so is he. Although healing was considered "work," it was part of God's life-giving purpose. Jesus affirms his divine authority to do good on the Sabbath.

In John 9:4, after healing a man born blind, Jesus emphasizes the importance of doing God's work while there's still time. "Night" represents a time when that opportunity ends, whether through death or his return is uncertain. Either way, Jesus reminds his disciples that the time to work isn't guaranteed.

Serving God and Others Through Work – Acts 20:33-35

On his way to Jerusalem for Pentecost, Paul stops in Miletus, near Ephesus. To avoid delays, he calls the Ephesian elders to meet him there (Acts 20:13-17). Knowing persecution awaits and this might be his final visit, Paul offers heartfelt encouragement for them to remain faithful in their calling to work, teach, and lead.

In Acts 20:33-35, Paul reminds them of his example, he never took advantage of anyone but worked with his own hands to support himself and help others. Serving the needy was at the heart of his ministry. He lived out Jesus' teaching:

"It is better to give than to receive," showing that hard work is not just for survival, but to serve, especially the weak and vulnerable.

Warnings Against Idleness – 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

The apostle Paul is speaking to the church at Thessalonica, a Greek city. This was a young Christian community that Paul had previously visited during his

missionary journeys. This is Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. He writes to correct some misunderstandings about the second coming. Because some members believed the second coming was imminent, they stopped working and started living off others. Paul warns that such idleness must stop immediately! It burdens others and damages the church's reputation. Instead of idleness, Paul urges the Thessalonians to model their behavior after the examples

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set by him and his disciples while they were in Thessalonica. He reminds them that he and his disciples worked hard to take care of their own needs, even though they had the right to rely on the church for support.

Furthermore, Paul gives stern warnings against enabling idleness by emphasizing the principle: “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” Note that this warning is aimed at individuals who are unwilling to work, not those who are unable.

SANKOFA

We’ve reflected on scriptures that change our view of work, from something simply secular to a sacred calling, as expressed in our theme: “Useful Work as Christian Duty.” A powerful example of this truth is seen in the lives of Bishop Richard Allen and Reverend Absalom Jones during the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Philadelphia, which was then the U.S. capital. As the disease killed nearly 5,000 people and caused many to flee, essential services broke down. Despite false

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beliefs that black people were immune, Bishop Allen and Reverend Jones, co-founders of the Free African Society, were called to help. Guided by their Christian faith and the Spirit, they responded to that call. With compassion and courage, they organized black volunteers to

nurse the sick, bury the dead, clean homes and streets, and care for orphans. Their service was not limited by race – it was driven by Christ’s command to “love thy neighbor as thyself.”

Although many black workers fell ill, and some, including Allen, nearly died, their service continued. Instead of gratitude, they faced slander and accusations of profiting from the crisis. In response, Bishop Allen and Reverend Jones published “A Narrative of the Proceedings of

the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia in the Year of 1793,” the first copyrighted pamphlet by African Americans. It stands as a testament of truth, dignity, and faithfulness under fire. Here, we see what it means to live out Christian duty: to serve humbly, love boldly, and stay faithful even when the world does not recognize us. This is faith made visible!

CASE STUDY

Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s life and leadership reflect our theme: “Useful Work as Christian Duty.” Her work,

marked by perseverance, service, and empowerment, was not about politics or personal gain, but about faithfully serving her people and honoring God through rebuilding a nation. Born in Monrovia, Liberia, on October 29, 1938, she became Africa’s first female head of state, serv-

ing as president of Liberia from 2006 to 2018. Before her presidency, she endured both exile and imprisonment for speaking out against authoritarianism.

Taking office after Liberia's Civil War, she focused on rebuilding the economy, reducing debt, fighting corruption, and advancing women's rights. In 2011, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize alongside Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkol Karman for their peaceful efforts for women's rights and peace. Even after stepping down, she continued working internationally through the United Nations and the African Union. Two of her most inspiring quotes are: "If your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough," and "Leadership is never given on a silver platter. One has to earn it." Her legacy reminds us that leadership rooted in faith is about purpose, not position – and that when we dedicate our work to God, he can use it to heal nations. As Proverbs says, "Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will succeed" (Proverbs 16:3). For more information, visit www.nobelprize.org and *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

LIFE APPLICATION

We've examined scriptures and examples that show God's perspective on work, not as punishment or pointless labor, but as a way to

add purpose to our lives and help others. Whether at home, in the workplace, at school, or in our communities, meaningful work becomes a spiritual act when we serve God through it.

God calls us to work diligently, be reliable, and act honestly in our efforts. While God wants us to have balance through both work and rest, idleness is not part of God's plan. Our work isn't just for personal benefit but also to help the weak and vulnerable. A key difference from the world's view of work is that when we align our

hearts with God's purposes, our work becomes part of his ongoing mission in the world.

Questions:

1. How has this study shaped your understanding of work in God's eyes?
2. What concerns do you have about helping the weak through your work? Should there be limits?
3. How might this lesson impact your church's view on personal responsibility and acts of benevolence?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Song: "When We Walk with the Lord," *AME Hymnal* #377

Closing Prayer: Unto thee, O Lord, we bow. We ask for your care and guidance. Please forgive our sins and help us to live according to

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your holy Word. Thank you for being so patient as we grow in understanding your plans for our

lives. In Jesus' name, we thank you and praise your holy name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 11-17

Monday	Proverbs 10:1-5, 15-16 (Work Diligently Before God)
Tuesday	Matthew 20:1-16 (The Workers and Their Wages)
Wednesday	Amos 5:6-15 (God Demands Justice for All)
Thursday	James 5:1-11 (Wait Patiently for God's Justice)
Friday	Colossians 3:12-17 (Rendering Service With Enthusiasm)
Saturday	Deuteronomy 24:14-21 (Justice for the Common Worker)
Sunday	1 Timothy 6:6-8, 17-19 (Contentment, Humility, and Generosity)