

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. [www.dtminc.org](http://www.dtminc.org) Today's Date: September 3, 2023

## What Are You Working For?

by Dan Trygg

“My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.”

John 5:17

This is Labor Day weekend. It is a good opportunity to consider what our perspective should be toward work. What does the Bible teach about work? Were people created for work? Will there be work in heaven? Is work and labor (or toil) the same? How should our faith in Christ affect our attitude toward working? How does being a serious follower of Jesus Christ enlarge and adjust our perspective of what we are to be working for?

**(1.) We were created to work.** God Himself is a worker, and He purposely made us to be like Him, ...in His image and likeness. Jesus said, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” (Jn. 5:19). We should not be surprised to find that God created humankind, and immediately gave them a job, ...a responsibility of care and stewardship of the Garden of Eden. They were to “till it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). The word for “till” means to “work, cultivate, or serve” and the word for “keep” means to “guard, protect, or preserve”. It was a responsibility that included creativity and stewardship. It would require effort, an investment of time, energy and care, but was rewarding. One aspect of work was that it provided sustenance. They could eat from the fruit of the ground.

**(2.) Work became toilsome, difficult and frustrating as a consequence of sin.** Part of the consequence of sin was that the ground produced weeds, thorns and thistles. It would require much more effort and toil to obtain the food needed for survival. The word for “toil” in Genesis 3:17 (“Cursed is the ground because of you; in *toil* you shall eat of it all the days of your life.”) is the same word used in the previous verse to describe the pain that women would experience in childbirth. The Hebrew word, *‘its-tsa-bown*, means, “toil, labor, pain, hardship or sorrow”. Work which was to be creative, productive and rewarding would now have this resistance, difficulty, and wearying aspect to it. Yet, this toilsome work would be required in order to survive.

**(3.) Painful labor has been exacerbated by human greed, exploitation, and oppression.** The Bible has much to say about this. **God condemns unfair treatment of workers, or withholding their pay. He rebukes threats, violence, or oppression of the poor or vulnerable** (“You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns. <sup>15</sup> You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he may not cry against you to Yahweh and it become sin in you.” -- Deut. 24:14,15; cf. Lev. 19:13; “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against... those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the foreigner, and do not fear Me,” says Yahweh of Hosts.” -- Mal. 3:5; cf. Prov. 3:27-28; “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. <sup>2</sup> Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup> Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. You have stored up treasure in the last days! <sup>4</sup> Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [Hosts]. <sup>5</sup> You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.” -- James 5:1-5; “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” – Lk. 10:7; “Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, willing to share, <sup>19</sup> storing up for themselves a good foundation for the age to come, so that they may take hold of life that is real.” – 1 Tim. 6:17-19; “Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.” – Col. 4:1; “And, masters, ...give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.” – Eph. 6:9). **The selfishness and greed of people has fostered such attitudes and practices throughout history, including not only exploitation and abuse in the form of long hours, unhealthy or dangerous working conditions, inadequate pay, but even to the extreme extent of enslaving people, physically or economically.** Labor Day was born out of the American labor movement, which protested and lobbied for changes in what had become horribly abusive labor practices and conditions. It was to be a recognition of the value and dignity of workers, ...a thoroughly biblical value.

**(4.) In Christ, we can find rest and reorientation.** Jesus clearly saw and understood the damaging effects of living under the destructive, soul-crushing dynamics of the world system. He saw many as being distressed (harassed, troubled, rubbed-raw, picked on until they were bloody) and downcast (helpless and hopeless as in a ‘cast sheep’, stuck on its back) like sheep with no shepherd to care for them (Matt. 9:36). **He called people who were worn out from life, false religion and human oppression to come to Him.** “Come unto Me all you who are weary (exhausted from toilsome struggle) and heavy-laden (burdened down with weight too heavy to bear)...” **What does He offer us?** Rest for our souls, healing for our wounds, getting us back on our feet, and giving to us the nurture, sustenance and care that we need. **He offers to be our Shepherd.** **If we will listen to His voice, and follow Him, He will give us hope for our minds, new life and vitality from**

**His Spirit for our bodies.** And, He will give us a yoke that is *not* oppressive, and a burden that is appropriate and manageable for us. Note, however, that we still have responsibilities. We still have a job to do, but it will be fitting and manageable for us. **If we will follow His leading, He will enable us to overcome the oppression of the world.**

**(5.) To follow God, we must choose to live differently.** Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. He inevitably will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). “Mammon” was the god of money, wealth, property. He represented worldly prosperity. In the OT, God had said, “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. <sup>2</sup> **Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance.** <sup>3</sup> **Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live...**” (Isa. 55:1-3). In John 6, Jesus told those who were looking for Him to miraculously provide more bread, “Don't labor for the food (the meal) that perishes but for the food (the meal) that is abiding unto eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you” (John 6:27). **There is a different way to live; there is a different focus and source for life than simply what we can produce through our efforts. Jesus said that “the thief (Satan) comes only to steal, kill and destroy, but I came that you might have life, and might have it abundantly”** (Jn. 10:10). The enemy wants to hold us captive to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26); Jesus came to set us free to serve in newness of the Spirit (Gal. 5:1; Rom. 7:6). We have been set free from the authority of the enemy, the dominion of the law, the bondage of the flesh, or the power of this world. **By the indwelling life of Jesus we can overcome the enemy, fulfill what the law would require, walk in the freedom of the Spirit, and express the power of the kingdom of God. By the radiance of Christ in us, we can bring light into the darkness of this lost and cruel world.**

**(6.) We are called to work with God.** The apostle Paul refers to us as “co-laborers” (1 Cor. 3:9). The word means “joint workers”, ones who are working at the same time together on a common project. Ephesians 2:10 says that **we are God's workmanship, His craftsmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which He has prepared beforehand, that we might walk in them.** God has prepared *us* for the works, and He has prepared *the works* for us, ...and He even brings the opportunities for these works into our lives. **How is this supposed to happen?** According to Philippians 2:12,13, **there is a partnership involved. We are to “work out” the salvation that God is “working in” us. He works in us both a desire and ability to do what is required.** This is His grace, ...the inworking of His power and vitality in us by His Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 6:1 **we are to see ourselves as “co-working” with God, as we show ourselves to be His servants by the gracious way we endure hardships, and by the acts of love and displays of God's power in and through our lives. A key application of that is that (a.) we ought to be working to support ourselves** (Eph. 4:28). There were some Christians in Paul's time who were irresponsible. They wanted to opt out of working altogether, expecting others to support them, or that God would miraculously provide for them. They were not being productive at all. They were lazy, not willing to live a disciplined, structured life (1 Thess. 4:11,12; 2 Thess. 3:11-15). They were not “showing themselves to be servants of God” by this. They were demonstrating that they were serving themselves, not Christ. **A second application is (b.) we bring light into the darkness when we overcome evil with good.** Having a joyful, positive attitude at your job, and being an excellent worker will be more effective at demonstrating that you are a servant of Christ. We bring Christ into the workplace when we display the life and grace of Jesus in that environment. Paul said that we ought to see ourselves serving Jesus *in that job*. We ought to do our work heartily, and with excellence, as if we were serving Christ. We live *in the world*, but we are not *of the world*. The work in the world system is often toilsome, repetitive, and wearying. When a follower of Jesus is filled with the life and joy that comes from communion with Him, and displays that by their good attitude, integrity, their positive work ethic, and their kindness and patience towards others, people notice. When we are doing *that*, we are bringing the life of Jesus *right into the darkness* of the world of work. We *demonstrate* that we are servants of God! **A third application is (c.) Christians who are business owners and employers ought to be exemplary in the treatment of their workers.** This should go beyond what the business practices that the non-Christian culture follows. How can I, as a business owner, clearly display my value for those who would work in my company? Beyond just the mechanics of the business, how can I express the heart of God for those who work with me? If I am serving God, in my business, and not Mammon, how would that be reflected in how I would structure my company, and how we treat those we employ? How could I reveal the kingdom of God in my dealings with my vendors, workers, and customers?

**One of the other questions I brought up at the top of this article was “Will there be work in heaven?” The short answer is “Yes.”** First, in the millennial reign of Christ, we will reign with Him for 1,000 years, over the nations that remain. Jesus' parable of the minas (Lk. 19:11-27) also seems to indicate that our faithfulness in this life will determine our responsibilities in the future kingdom. Finally, Revelation 22:3 says that there will be no more curse (no more toilsome labor) and that “the bond-servants of God shall serve Him”. **God is a worker, and we are in His image. We have been designed to be productive, creative, capable and valuable servants. It will be our joy to serve our Maker and King, who gave Himself for us and served us, so that we could be free to love and serve from the heart.**