

# September 5, 2021

## Lovin' Labour Day

### Assorted Proverbs on Work

According to the media, a full, satisfying, content life would be lying in a hammock on a tropical beach, with an unlimited supply of food and drink ... and nothing to do but watch the waves roll in ... Day in. Day out. Sun. Surf. Suds. And a beautiful/handsome companion.

Is that really what life is all about? I don't know about you, but a couple of days – even a couple of weeks – of carefree Tropicana might be nice, but then I'd want to **do** something ... something meaningful ... something that made a difference for people around me ... that made the world a better place ... that made live worth living ... that mattered to God ... I'd want to actually be a **person living a life**, not just a vegetable baking in the sun ...

Sociologists might blame John Calvin and his so-called "Protestant work ethic" for my desire to serve God and do something meaningful with my life. But it goes deeper than Reformation theology. From the very beginning, people were created for a purpose – "*The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it ...*" (Genesis 2:15). Created "*in the image of God*" (Genesis 1:27), we are designed to do something: to care for God's creation – the natural world and other people. That's inextricably woven into who we are.

As God's people, we are only fulfilled, content, and joyful when we share in God's purpose: actively involved in the lives of people and the created world around us. Those of us who have volunteered with children, in a hospital, with youth, at the soup kitchen, or cleaning up a park know the sense of peace, joy, and satisfaction that comes from doing something meaningful, something that matters. Being busy about the Lord's work is a good thing.

The self-indulgent laziness that some companies advertise (let's call it what it is) may be OK for a couple of days or even a week, but it doesn't bring the deep contentment and meaningful joy it promises. It can't. Because it doesn't deal with our fundamental identity as God's creatures, created to bless others, shaped to serve Him. It doesn't speak to our souls.

Even in retirement, the Bible encourages us to keep busy – not **just** golfing or vacationing. Again, recreation is fine, in balance with doing something that serves God. There are always meaningful things we can do for others, the world around us, and to build God's Kingdom. In the Bible, a healthy balance of work and leisure is the norm ... at every stage of life.

An interesting passage to reflect on is Psalm 92:12-15: "*The godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted to the LORD's own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. Even in **old age** they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green.*"

Sometimes we think that, as we age, we "retire" from the Lord's work. One person once told me, "*I've done my time, now others need to step up*" ("I've done my time"! What a horrible expression – sounds like prison). The truth is quite the opposite. God still has many, many

things people in “old age” (God uses that term, not me) can do: mentoring, encouraging, visiting, calling, serving, leading, praying, volunteering. People who are no longer working at paid employment are often key volunteers and pray-ers in the church and community – they have expertise, wisdom, and time. One of our First B folks wisely said to me, *“What retired people need to do is ‘buzz’ around the church like bees, looking for things to do.”*

Here’s something to reflect on: “retirement” isn’t a word or concept that occurs anywhere in the Bible. God has no retirement plan. He expects us to use our gifts, talents, abilities, and resources for His Kingdom at every stage of life, even more as we have more “free” time!

In Ephesians 2, Paul celebrates our salvation in Jesus. He reminds us, *“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it”* (Ephesians 2:8-9). We don’t work to earn God’s grace. It is His gracious gift to us. But then Paul goes on, *“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that \_\_\_\_\_”* (Ephesians 2:10). How is Paul going to finish that sentence?

- *“so that we can lay in a hammock on a beach?”*
- *“so that we earn lots of money and retire to the golf course?”*
- *“so that we can go to heaven when we die?”*

*“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that ...”* The answer? *“... So that **we can DO the good things he planned for us long ago.**”* God has a purpose for you, right here, right now. He has saved you to make a difference in the world – right here, right now. It’s not (just) about heaven in the future, it’s about serving God – caring for people, caring for His creation, in this place, at this time. You are saved for a purpose: to serve God by blessing other people and His creation.

What are the opportunities God gives you to do something meaningful? Can you call and encourage someone? Go for coffee with a person going through a hard time? Help a family with young children? Volunteer? Be a prayer warrior? You have so much to offer at whatever stage you are at in life – experience, skills, insight, love, talents, encouragement. You can make an incredible difference for God’s Kingdom through the opportunities He gives you to serve, encourage, and help.

### ***Work ... pays the bills***

Of course, there is a very pragmatic purpose to work, too! Work pays the bills. *“I went past the field of a sluggard, past the vineyard of someone who has no sense,”* writes Solomon, *“Thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man.”* (Proverbs 24:30-34)

In a passage Mark read back in July, Solomon says, *“Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones (or sluggard). Learn from their ways and become wise! Though they have no*

*prince or governor or ruler to make them work, they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter. But you, lazybones, how long will you sleep? When will you wake up? A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding the hands to rest – then poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like an armed robber. (Proverbs 6:6-11)*

God expects us to work to earn a living. I trust we can agree on that.

It is wonderful and good that we have a society that cares for people who, for a variety of reasons, cannot support themselves. That is a rich legacy of Christian influence and Christian values put into practice. But those of us who can work, of course, ought to work (when I worked for the Vancouver School Board, we had some seasonal workers who worked summers then collected EI for the winter while they skied at Whistler – they never looked for work; they had “earned” their ski months... that’s taking advantage of the system).

### ***Work builds character***

*“All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty” (Proverbs 14:23). “Profit” and “poverty” do not necessarily refer to finances – although they can. They can also refer to the profit hard work can bring to our souls, knowing we have put in a good day’s effort. Our work is well done. There is blessing that comes from being active, busy, and diligent. And there is a feeling of emptiness and discontent that comes when we know we’re being lazy, making excuses, just scraping by doing the absolute minimum, or doing a poor job.*

Throughout Proverbs, wise people recognize that work not only earns a living but builds character. For instance, Proverbs 31:10-31, a fascinating hymn on a “wife of noble character,” describes the character of a noble/virtuous/excellent person (this can refer to ALL people, not just wives) as hard-working:

*“Who can find a virtuous and capable wife? She is more precious than rubies ... She finds wool and flax and busily spins it. She is like a merchant’s ship, bringing her food from afar. She gets up before dawn to prepare breakfast for her household and plan the day’s work ... She goes to inspect a field and buys it; with her earnings she plants a vineyard. She is energetic and strong, a hard worker. She makes sure her dealings are profitable; her lamp burns late into the night. Her hands are busy spinning thread, her fingers twisting fiber. She extends a helping hand to the poor and opens her arms to the needy. She has no fear of winter for her household, for everyone has warm clothes ... She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future. When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness. She carefully watches everything in her household and suffers nothing from laziness.” (Proverbs 31:10-27)*

What is the result of this hard work? *“Her children stand and bless her. Her husband praises her: ‘There are many virtuous and capable women in the world, but you surpass them all!’ Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the LORD will be greatly praised. Reward her for all she has done. Let her deeds publicly declare her praise” (Proverbs 31:28-31).* Wouldn’t that be great if it were true of EACH of us?

## ***What is it about work that we resent?***

What is it about work that we find so unattractive? What is it about laziness that seems so alluring? We were created to work – work in balance with Sabbath and re-creation, not workaholism! But that balance can be VERY difficult to find. People we know (never ourselves, of course) drift toward one extreme (laziness or obsessive workaholism) so easily.

Somehow with Adam and Eve's sin, the whole nature of everything – people, creation (Genesis 3:14-15), AND work became distorted (Genesis 3:16-19). So, we shouldn't be surprised that finding the natural rhythm of work and rest is difficult to attain.

One of the gifts God gives us as part and parcel of our salvation is the Holy Spirit (remember Ephesians 2:1-10). The Holy Spirit can help us recover that sense of seeing our lives – including our work, whether paid employment or volunteer service – as service for God. When we put our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit works in us to change all sorts of things – our priorities, our values, our ethics, and even our perspective on work: *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters"* writes Paul (Colossians 3:23). Is that possible? It is if we invite and allow the Spirit to work in our lives.

*"My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions of selfishness. For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness ... What happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard – things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely ..."*

*"Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives."* (Galatians 5:16-25 The Message)

What is God saying to you? How can we allow God's Spirit to change our way of life? To "live God's way"? How can we live "the life of the Spirit ... and work out its implications in every detail of our lives"?

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