

# You Need Your Work

Good to see you guys. If you're watching online, thanks for tuning in. For all of you, if you have a bible, go ahead and turn with me to the book of **2 Thessalonians, chapter 3**. Today, the plan is to **wrap up** the series we've been in the past six weeks all about work. It's been cool for me just to have conversations with a lot of you over the past couple months, and hear about how God has used this series and the wisdom of the Scriptures to, in a lot of cases, completely *re-frame* how you think about and approach your work.

And today, I want to conclude by giving what may come across as a very **direct challenge—maybe even a confrontation**—to some of us. Which means there may be times during the teaching today that you think to yourself, “is he mad at us or something?” And the truth is no—I'm not mad at you at all. In fact, I'm in a great spot. Fresh off a week off, two weeks off of preaching—I'm in a great mood. But in the Scriptures, there is one common *problem* when it comes to work, that the biblical authors refuse to mince words about. They speak directly and *confrontationally* about it, and so **I'm just gonna let the tone of the texts be the tone**. I'm not gonna try to sugarcoat it at all—instead, I'm just going to do my best to unpack it, and **let it land where it needs to land**. Does that make sense?

Now, in order to do this we're actually going to look at **three different passages**. Because I want us to see that this isn't just a one-off thing in the Scriptures—it's actually a point of *emphasis* when it comes to work. So we're going to cover three different places in our bible—we'll be jumping around a bit. So if you consider yourself an expert level bible-flipper, you're welcome to follow us to each individual passage. If you're *not* so great at bible flipping, we'll actually have all of these passages up on the screen as well. But let's start things off in this passage from **2 Thessalonians**, chapter 3. Start reading with me in v. 6:

*[6] Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in **idleness** and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.*

So that word **“idleness”** describes **someone who walks through life in an undisciplined or irresponsible sort of way**. It's forsaking the work you were given to do. When a person consistently *isn't* taking care of the responsibilities they have been given, and therefore have excess time and energy on their hands, the bible calls that

*idleness*. So idleness is very **different than *rest***. We talked about *rest* a few weeks ago. **Rest is where you work hard, and you take an intentional amount of time to rest from your work, so that you are recharged and replenished to *continue* working. *Idleness*, is when you regularly shirk off responsibility and have an *aversion* to it.** It's operating like you're *allergic* to work and responsibility. Do you see the difference there?

Now Paul, the author of this letter, is gonna unpack **all of that a bit more in a few**, but **first he contrasts** *idleness* with his *own* posture towards work, from back when he was with these Thessalonians in person. Look with me, continuing in v. 7:

*[7] For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, [8] nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it—but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. [9] It was not because we do not have that right [in other words, the right to receive financial support from you], but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. [10] For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.*

So a little context here. Paul, the person writing this, is an **itinerant church starter**. He travels from city to city, tells people about Jesus, and then once people respond to that he starts a church in that area. The Thessalonian church was one of those churches. So the point he's making is that he did have the *right* to receive financial support from this church—since, after all, he was working *for them*. *But* he chose *not* to receive financial support from them (even though he *could*), simply so that no one can accuse him of being idle. Or **put positively**, he did this so that the Thessalonians would have an example to follow when it comes to working hard and bearing appropriate responsibility. **Paul so passionately wants them to learn this attitude towards their work, that he's willing to work an extra job on the side so that they have an example to follow.**

In other words, **Paul thinks it is a very good thing to have the weight of responsibility on a person's shoulders**. He thinks a certain amount of *pressure* to provide for ourselves can actually be a very a helpful thing. **To the point** that he then says if a person has the *ability* to work, but *refuses* to do so out of laziness and idleness, that *hunger* should motivate them to begin working, saying “if someone will not work, let him not eat.” Let the potential of starvation push them to start working. Paul just lays *that* on them real quick.

And next he describes **the problem that occurs** when people *aren't* willing to work—v. 11:

*[11] For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but [instead are] busybodies.*

Okay, so **the word “busybody”** is probably not a word that any of us have used since at least the 1960s or so. But in the context of this passage, being a “busybody” means literally “to waste one’s labor.” One Lexicon defined it as “to busy oneself about trifling, needless, useless matters.” One commentator used the word *meddling*—being a *busybody* is when you *meddle* in the affairs of other people. It’s someone who is way too involved in other people’s business. **And just think—Paul thought this was an issue before Facebook stalking and Facebook comment sections existed. Just imagine what he would say to our society today.**

**But here’s the idea:** when people aren’t stepping into their God-ordained work and responsibilities, they now have excess energy to burn. And some people are in turn *using* that excess energy to become *overinvolved* in things they have no business being involved in. ~~Precisely because they’re not spending their energy on what it was meant for, they’re spending it on useless things instead.~~ Does that make sense?

Okay that’s **the problem**—now Paul is about to prescribe **the solution**—look at v. 12:

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

The **solution** he offers is **very simple and straightforward:** these people should take *responsibility* for themselves and earn their own living, and then they won’t have any *excess energy* to waste on useless things and on the business of others. In other words, *work*, so you aren’t *idle*. Simple enough, right?

Okay, let me show you **another passage** that makes a very similar point to this one. This one’s from **1 Timothy 5**. First Timothy, if you’re unfamiliar, is a book written by the same guy as Thessalonians—Paul—but this time is writing to a younger leader named Timothy, about how Timothy should lead the church that he’s in charge of.

And **in the portion we’re about to read**, Paul is actually giving some instruction to Timothy on how he should run a *benevolence* ministry they’ve got going within the church.

Specifically, it's a benevolence ministry for *women* who had been widowed. Back then, even more so than today, when a woman's husband passed away, that often would leave her very financially vulnerable. And so the church here in Ephesus was trying to see to it that they could help provide for women in that type of scenario. Obviously a very helpful, very important thing for followers of Jesus to be a part of.

But in this passage, Paul actually wants to give Timothy **one thing to watch out for** as they go about this ministry. Apparently there were *some* women who wanted to *take advantage* of this ministry for selfish purposes. So look with me at **1 Timothy 5**, **starting in v. 9**:

*[9] Let a widow be enrolled* [meaning, let her have access to this financial support available,] *if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, [10] and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work* [meaning, if she has shown an eagerness to participate in valuable kingdom work and responsibility, give her the financial support]. *[11] But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry [12] and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.*

So obviously there's **a lot in there** that we could pick apart, and probably a lot to get hung up on too. But **in short**, his point is that when there are women who *need* financial assistance, the church should give it to them. But when there are women who are *able* to provide for themselves, and are just using the *church* to provide for them so that they can in turn be *idle*, the church should *not* provide *them* with a means to do *that*. And **the reason for this, again, is that it's actually not good for us as human beings to be without responsibilities. And if you eliminate people's responsibilities for them, their passions and excess energy may lead them in unhealthy directions.** In this case, women who end up marrying men that draw them away from following Jesus.

He then **continues**, v. 13:

*[13] Besides that, they learn to be idlers* [sound familiar?], *going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies* [there's our **other word again**], *saying what they should not.*

So **hear him correctly, ladies**: Paul isn't trying to say that all women *gossip*. This is not his version of a "women be shoppin'" comment or something. But he *is* saying, once again, that **when people are idle—when they have excess energy to burn and no responsibilities—they will spend that energy on something**. And apparently *one* thing that some women in *this* context were spending that energy on was gossiping and overly concerning themselves with other people's business. They had become "gossips" and "busybodies."

So this is **very similar** to what he said **about men and women** back in 2 Thessalonians: **your responsibilities in life need to correspond to your energy. When they don't, you will have energy, but no appropriate outlet for it. And when that happens, Paul says, we are vulnerable to things like overinvolvement in other people's lives, gossip, and even apparently lapses in sexual integrity according to 1 Timothy 5.**

Now **once again**, Paul prescribes a very **simple, straightforward solution** to this problem. Look with me at v. 14:

*[14] So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.*

So, **just in case that threw you off**, Paul isn't trying to say that marriage and childbearing is *the solution* for idleness. *Culturally* at this time, women didn't have many other options at the time in terms of employment. So **this is simply a way of saying that these women who can handle responsibilities, should take on those responsibilities**, as a way of guarding against idleness in their lives. So **once again, the solution to idleness is the appropriate level of work and responsibility.**

Okay, let's do **one more passage** and then we'll zoom out and talk a little about what all of this means for us. This one is from **2 Samuel 11**, and this time it's not so much *instruction* and *teaching* on idleness—it's **a story about idleness**. And specifically, an example of a time when idleness in a *man's* life led to all sorts of horrible things. For context, this is the beginning of a popular story in the Old Testament about David's adultery with a woman named Bathsheba. We're going to read about **where all of that started**.

So take a look with me in 2 Samuel 11, starting in v. 1:

[1] *In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.*

So don't miss **the detail** in that verse. It says at "the time when kings go out to battle," *David is* a king, but **where is David?** He "remained in Jerusalem." He neglected and passed off *his* responsibilities, and stayed *idle* at home. So we're off to a rocky start already. Keep reading in v. 2:

[2] *It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch* [where did he arise from? His *couch*. I've found that the *couch* tends to be a favorite location of idle people] *and [he] was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. [3] And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"*

David is at home, he's idle—and decides to go for a walk on the rooftop and sees a woman bathing. This woman happens to be the *wife* of one of his commanding officers at war. David is *not* out doing what he is supposed to be out doing. **He's entirely unburdened by responsibility and has energy to burn, so he starts to lust after another man's wife.** And if you know the story, David proceeds to use his power and influence to take advantage of Bathsheba, gets her pregnant, and then has her husband—*his* commanding officer—murdered to cover it all up. And in the story of the bible, this begins a generational breakdown in David's family that takes *generations* to them to recover from.

And **it all starts because David's energy is not balanced by his responsibilities.** David had responsibilities, but when he *neglected* them, his life and his family's life started going off the rails. Now the point is not to say that if you are idle, you will end up sleeping with another man's wife and committing murder—it obviously doesn't always lead to that. But the point is to say that *idleness* will always lead to *unproductive* things, and sometimes can lead to utterly *destructive* things.

So, here's the point. **With all three of the passages** we just looked at, the very same *idea* is at play: that **your energy is meant to be spent taking responsibility for yourself and others. It is meant to be spent on the responsibilities God has put in front of you and called you to. So when you choose to neglect those types of responsibilities, trouble usually follows close behind.** You will inevitably start to



spend that time and effort and energy on unfruitful, unhelpful, or maybe even outright *unfaithful* things.

And we see this type of situation play out *often* in our society, even if we wouldn't have had the framework for it until just now. So how many times have we seen **a family do really well** for themselves, they get really wealthy, and it creates a situation where the *kids* in that family don't have to get jobs, and can just live off the dividends? Now there's nothing wrong with coming from a wealthy family. But often, when those kids don't have responsibilities of *some sort*, it doesn't take long before the kids start running their lives off the rails because they have no *work* to concern themselves with. Or, how often do we see **celebrities**, who make millions of dollars on a few movies, decide that they're just gonna check out and live off of what they've made, and then end up throwing their lives away due to addiction to substances or any number of other destructive behaviors? How many times have we seen a version of *that* story play out?

Do you see **what's happening** in those situations? Quite often, it's *idleness*. At least an awful lot of the time, it's that those people are living a life without work, without regular *responsibility*, and because they have energy to burn, they waste it on things that end up being really destructive to themselves and others. **Which is exactly what the Scriptures teach will happen if we neglect our God-given work.**

But this doesn't just happen in the lives of rich kids and celebrities—it happens in all sorts of people. I've seen **men** I know land **well-paying jobs** that require very few office hours or responsibilities. And as a result, they start buying thing after thing that they don't need: a third car, a classic car, a fourth motorcycle, a boat that they'll use three times a year at most. It doesn't take long at all for a lack of work to lead to materialism and excess—which the Scriptures say is how people end up “wandering away from the faith and piercing themselves with many pangs.”<sup>1</sup>

I've seen some **women become moms**, but not really *want* to be *full-time* moms, *and* at the same time not really want to work a *job* either. So their husband finds a job where *he* can bring home the paycheck, *she* doesn't have to work, *and* they can just pay for full-time childcare for the kids. So the wife has a completely wide open schedule—no responsibilities at all. And instead of using that free time to give her life to something *worthwhile*, she chooses instead to just grab coffee or drinks with people, where they

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Timothy 6:10.

can gossip about *other* people, or spend money they don't have on things she doesn't need, or any number of other things.

I've seen *single men say that they're going to "take a few years off"* after college, where they decide to move back in with their parents rent-free, or move in with like 12 other guys into a house where they each pay like \$8/mo for rent, and just devote those years to a lot of video games, a lot of cheap beer, and a lot of enjoying their parents' medical insurance. And more often than not, *shockingly*, those years don't end up being stellar years for their maturity or spiritual growth.

For some people, idleness leads to *a preoccupation with sports*—reading every article and every scouting report and every recruiting update they can get their hands on. I've seen it lead to being over concerned with *politics*—getting tangled up regularly in fruitless political debates and arguments, and spreading political misinformation on Facebook. For some, I've even seen idleness lead to a bizarre infatuation with *pointless theological debates*. All of a sudden they start devoting all their spare time to nitpicking aspects of theology that pretty much only their theological tribe cares about.

For still others, it's a propensity towards *relational drama*. Because they don't have an appropriate level of responsibility in their life, they spend that excess energy creating conflict and offense out of thin air, among their group of friends. They take little things that happened or were said and blow them up into big things. They overanalyze people's words and tone and assign horrible motives to things people said.

I think idleness is what has *a lot of us addicted to social media*. I know a lot of good happens on Facebook and Instagram—so don't hear me just knocking it—but have you ever considered what it is that *drives* us towards those things? Often, it's that we don't have a ton going on in our lives—we're bored—so we start scrolling and concerning ourselves with what *other* people have going on in *their* lives, because *their* lives are more interesting. Am I lying? And then we *wonder* why we start getting jealous of other people that have more going on than us. But isn't that kind of what made us log on in the first place—that we didn't have anything going on, and we wanted to see what other people had going on? Shocking that it would lead to any type of *discontentment* in our lives.

I think this is what pushes many people towards watching *porn* and using *apps to hook up with people that they meet online*. Obviously both of those things are driven by lust on some level—but often it's lust *accompanied* by *idleness*. Just like David on his roof: when



we're idle, we are looking for somewhere to *burn* that excess energy. And for a lot of people, porn or sex is the outlet of choice.

This one requires some **nuance**, but I think idleness is also the driving force behind **hobbies for a lot of people**. Things like reading, traveling, exercising, gardening. Obviously it's not *wrong* to have hobbies—often it's actually a really *healthy* thing to have hobbies. But I am saying if you are throwing large amounts of your time, energy and money into your *hobbies*, and neglecting to throw an *appropriate* amount of time, effort and energy into your *work* or things that have eternal *significance*, something's off there, isn't it?

So listen—I **could go on** with examples. I think I've already gone on too long, but I think you're starting to get the idea: God has given us a certain amount of time and energy to give to things that matter—often, to our *work*. But **when we *don't* spend that energy on *worthwhile* things, we often give it to things that at *best* are pointless and a waste of time, and at *worst* are outright destructive to us and other people.**

Now, maybe **your gut reaction** is to hear all this and go “no, no—that's not me. I have a *ton* going on. Maybe *too* much. In fact, I *wish* I had some time for idleness—where do I sign up for some more *idleness* in my life? That sounds nice.” Maybe that's true. You might be right, this chart might not be an accurate picture of your life—yours might be off kilter in the *other* direction, even. But I know that for *some* of us, it *is* and we just don't realize it. Our inclination towards *self-deception* prevents us from seeing it.

So just **in an effort to try and offend *everyone***—myself included—let me rattle off a few scenarios that might expose *idleness* in our lives, whether or not we would've previously identified it as such. You guys ready? This should be fun. And by “fun,” I mean not very fun at all and convicting. But either way, here we go. Here are some *identifiers* of idleness:

- If you have *not* read your bible this week, but you *have* watched a TV show.
- If you have *not* had an intentional conversation with someone, but you *have* scrolled through social media.
- If you have checked in on the recruiting for your favorite sports team, but you haven't checked in on your roommate.
- If you *have* put in effort to get better at your *hobbies*, but have *not* put in effort to get better at your *job*.

- If people at work don't seek your expertise on work-related items but do seek your expertise on breaking down the latest popular movie or celebrity gossip.
- If you've not set aside time for prayer today but you've listened to Tay Swift's new album *twice* (~~hey—it's a good album, not saying it isn't. Just saying it's not quite as important as talking to Jesus—that's all~~)
- If you've spent time critiquing, arguing and judging other people on social media, but have not spent time asking the Holy Spirit where *you* need to grow and mature.
- If you haven't checked in to see how someone in your LifeGroup is doing, but you've made it all the way to chapter 6 of *Red Dead Redemption 2*.
- If you have spent more time making your house look like Chip & Joanna's house than making your marriage look like Jesus & the Church.
- If you can't be committed to being around other followers of Jesus, but you can be committed to binging a show on Netflix.

And we could keep going, right? But I won't, because I think most of us get the point. And listen, I **don't say any of that to heap guilt on you** or make you feel terrible yourself—that's not my heart at all. I simply bring it up because **I think many of us have convinced ourselves that we don't have the time or energy or bandwidth for kingdom things, and it's actually just that we've given a decent chunk of our energy to things that don't really matter much at all.**

So **what do we do** about all of this? If we find ourselves with excess energy to burn over and above the responsibilities we've been given, what is the *healthy* way to expend that time and energy? I think what Paul would suggest is expending it on what we might call **kingdom work**. Things like contributing to your own spiritual growth—spending time in the Scriptures, and if you already do that, reading books and listening to podcasts that help you grow in your relationship with Jesus *through* the Scriptures. Things like contributing to *other people's* spiritual growth—making your LifeGroup a priority in your schedule, and checking in with people from it throughout the week. Things like pouring into your spouse or kids or roommates. Things like going out of your way to build relationships with people at your work that don't know Jesus. Things like serving with us on Sundays on one of our Gathering teams. Things like giving your time to any number of the great non-profits in our city doing fantastic, kingdom work.

**One way or another,** give your spare time and energy to things that *matter*, instead of to things that *don't*. God did not create you to sit. He created you to join him in taking the world somewhere.

So I'll just wrap up here. I can still remember, back before we started City Church, Jeff (one of our other pastors) and I had a fundraising meeting with another pastor we had met. This pastor had started a church in a fairly wealthy part of his city, that surrounded a lake. And he had us meet him at a restaurant that kind of sat up on a hill, overlooking one of the marinas on the lake. And we were having lunch on a *Monday*—not a weekend, not a holiday—just an ordinary Monday. But when we looked out at this marina, you would've thought it was July 4th weekend. It looked like spring break for 30-50 year olds. I mean the lake was just *popping*. There was music, there were drinks being poured, tons of people—it did not look like a Monday at lunchtime one bit. And we were sitting at this restaurant watching all this happen, and the pastor we were meeting with, who planted in this area of the city, looked out at all of it, and said to us without skipping a beat, “you know, I've never met a group of people in my entire life more *devoted to leisure* than people here are.”

And I'll be honest, that sentence has stuck with me ever since. Not because I have some type of contempt for people who live in wealthy suburbs. Not because it's wrong to spend a day on the lake—in fact, if you do that regularly, I'd love an invite. None of that. It's stuck with me because it has caused *me* to continually ask myself, “am I more devoted to *leisure* than I am to things that *matter*?” Am I more devoted to my own comfort and ease than I am to becoming more like Jesus? Am I more devoted to the latest Netflix show than I am to the people in my LifeGroup? Am I more devoted to the latest social media outrage than I am to pursuing the good of my city and my world?

That comment from that pastor has put a *fire* under me. Because I don't know about you guys, but when I get to the end of my life, I don't want people to say about *me*, “you know, that Kent sure was devoted to *leisure*.” “He sure did have a cool boat.” “He was really good at Halo.” “He was caught up on all the best Netflix shows.” **No. First and foremost, I want God saying about me, “well done, my good and faithful servant.” And then, if anything is said about me by other people, I want it to be said about me that I poured my life out in *service* to God and in *love* for others. I want people in my life to be closer to Jesus because of the effort I put in. I want it to be that I did whatever I could do to bring the kingdom of God to bear on earth as it is in heaven. *That's* what I want.**

And I want those things to be true of our entire *community* here at City Church. I want us to live into the God-given work and responsibilities given us, and join God in taking the world somewhere. So as we wrap up this series, can we pray that God would make that true of us? Can we pray that Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit, would continue

to form us into a people who see the value in *work*—to devoting ourselves to the things that matter?

Let's ask him to do just that together.