

Work - Wk 4

“You Need Your Work”

7/18/21

2 Thess 3:6-13

Introduction

Tim. Pastor. CG RETREAT. **2 Thessalonians 3. Pray.**

Let me set us up....In week 1 we established that almost all of us put our work, our vocation, our labors - whatever it is that may be - into one of two overarching stories. Now I think all of us can be tempted to fluctuate back and forth depending on the season we are in, but I think we all have a bent towards one or the other.

Some of us Live to Work. For some of us our lives are consumed with our work - **we are what we do.** Cole went in on this last week. Addressing how we need an identity rooted in what Christ has done for us, rather than what our work accomplishes for us so that we can experience freedom in the gospel to put our work down. To give up the anxious and never-ending toiling of trying to earn status, worth, more and more and more.

But for others of us, and what I want to address today - is that **We work to live.** Work is a necessary evil which we avoid at all costs, we try to just put our head down, get through, do the bare minimum so we can get to the weekend or the vacation or the break or the bedtime and do what we actually want to do and enjoy our lives.

Thursday. If I can share some comedic irony - this was me on Thursday afternoon. I needed to finish up this sermon on working hard and not being lazy but everything in me was itching to just say “good enough” and be done. I wanted to take a nap, head to the mountains with my Community Group, and call it a day.

I wanted, at that moment, to reject the work that was laid before me. And if I’m honest, this is me more often than I want to admit. I like my hobbies. I like my leisure. I like naps. I like my golf.

And this, for me is especially true, not necessarily in my career, but in all the other **work** God calls me to outside of being the pastor of this church.

- My responsibility towards my family.
- My responsibility towards my friends.
- My responsibility towards my neighbors.
- My responsibility towards my own spiritual growth.

It’s often much easier for me to watch golf on Fridays than play with my kid. It can be much easier for me to spend a night with Lindsay watching TV on the couch than it is to invest over dinner or drinks with our neighbors.

And if I’m not careful, and if you’re anything like me maybe you’ve felt this too, if you lean towards this work to live mindset, you can begin to puff yourself up with pride at all of the folks who struggle with work idolatry. All all the folks who can’t put their work down.

Not me! I have balance! My identity is rooted in Christ! It’s easy for me to step away from my work! Maybe...also we could just be guilty of living into the work to live story instead.

We could miss that the Bible has so much to say to those of us with work idols sure, but also it says alot to those of us who have made our leisure an idol as well.

Who don't pour ourselves out towards our labors. Who don't give the proper amount of time, energy, or weight to our vocations. Those of us who the Bible would call lazy, a sluggard, a fool.

Here's where we're going tonight:

- 1) I want to walk us through 2 Thessalonians 3. A really clear passage where the New Testament addresses laziness and lack of good, hard work within a particular church.
- 2) I want to give us some warnings and dangers to be aware of when we don't fully step into our work.
- 3) I want to help give us a charge towards putting our whole selves into our labors.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 - Passage Walkthrough

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

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.

Pause right here. Let's talk about this idea of **idleness**.

Idle, as it's defined in the Scriptures, means - **someone who walks through life in an undisciplined or irresponsible way.**

The Bible also uses terms like a **sluggard** or someone who is **slothful**.

In other words - idleness is forsaking the work you were given to do. When a person consistently isn't taking care of the responsibilities they have been given, and aren't pouring out their time and energy into the stewardship God has placed before them, the bible calls that idleness.

Let me make something clear - **idleness is different from rest.** They look very similar but are in reality very different.

- Rest is where you work hard, and you take an intentional amount of time to pull back and refrain from your work, so that you are recharged and replenished to continue working. Rest, throughout the Scriptures is a good thing. Jesus, Himself says in Matthew 11 to go to Him and He will give us **rest**.
- Idleness is when you regularly avoid and neglect responsibility, it's like you have an aversion to it. Idleness is not stepping into your responsibility at all.

The Scriptures are clear - rest is a good thing. Idleness is not.

Paul tells this church → **Keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness**, then he contrasts idleness with - **walking in accord with the tradition they received from him.** Well what is that tradition?

He tells us, keep reading:

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, 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 background if you're not familiar - Paul was a church planter. He spent his life traveling around from city to city telling people about Jesus, raising up leaders, and starting new churches.

Now, in some of the cities where Paul started churches, he did ministry full time. The church took up offerings, supported him financially, he was cool with that. But in other churches, like the one here in Thessalonica, instead of taking a salary from the church, Paul and his companions took second jobs. He'd pastor during the day, and then go hustle at night and make a living.

So it's not wrong to get paid for ministry work, but the reason Paul doesn't take a salary in this context is because we know from both 1 and 2 Thessalonians that this church has a laziness and idleness problem. So Paul says in vs 10 - I didn't take a paycheck, but instead I worked hard to give you an example of how hard you should work.

The example Paul gives this church shows that 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 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 is not willing to work, let him not eat."

Just as an aside - he says "not willing". He doesn't say "not able". The Bible is full of examples where we take care of each other and we provide as a church family for those who can't provide for themselves. Paul says here though - If they're not willing, that's a different story. Stop enabling it and let their lack drive them to work.

He continues:

11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.

Let's talk about being a busybody. Chances are that's not a word any of have used since like 1965. But here in the text, to be a **busybody means literally - "to waste one's labor."**

One lexicon defined it as: "to busy oneself about trifling, needless, and useless matters."

Here's the idea: **When people aren't stepping into their God-ordained work and responsibilities, they now have excess energy to burn.**

And instead of that energy going towards the responsibilities God has laid before them - it goes towards trivial matters. This shows up all the time within our culture, but specifically let me show you how this might show up in your life or within the church:

- If you have not read your Bible this week because you "don't have time", but you have watched a TV show, any TV show, that's idleness.
- If you have not had an intentional spiritual conversation with your spouse but you've scrolled through social media, that's idleness.
- If you're more of an expert in your hobby than you are in your vocation or labors, or if people at work seek out your expertise on movies before they do on work, that's idleness.
- If your sink has been clogged for a month, but you're all caught up on the latest episodes of Fixer Upper...that's very ironic idleness.
- If you haven't checked in on a struggling member of your CG or prayed for them, but you've got all the latest fashion trends and updates, idle.

The sneaky part about all of this is that idleness is still expended energy, and so we still feel tired, we're just busybodies, like hamsters running and running around on a wheel, tiring ourselves out and yet going nowhere.

Let's finish out and then I'll summarize it all for us:

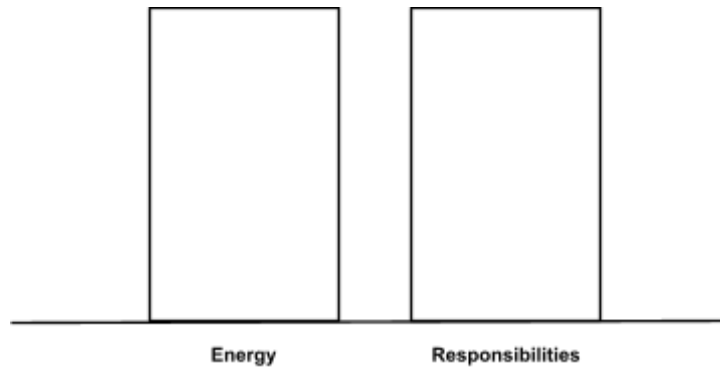
12 Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. 13 As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

That's Paul's charge for the idle....we'll come back to this at the end.

14 If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

CHART:

Let me try to summarize what all is happening here in this passage with what I hope is a helpful chart:



- Energy + Capacity given by God.
- Responsibilities should match.
- Good thing to be tired. Tired is not the enemy.

THIS WILL MAKE YOU TIRED. THAT'S A GOOD THING.

We have embraced the lie that if you achieve a perfect balance of work and life that you'll never be tired, you'll never struggle, you'll never feel like you're working too much or giving too much energy or effort.

That's not the Bible! That's not the way of Jesus. The way of Jesus is rest. Yes. Absolutely. But let's not forget Jesus also came to serve. Jesus also poured Himself out in sacrifice for us. So we follow suit → We pour ourselves out.

Your culture has lied to you! Being tired is not a bad thing! Being tired means you gave yourself to something worth giving yourself to!

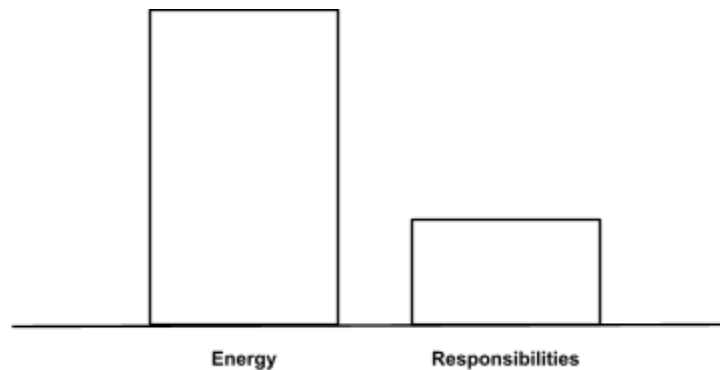
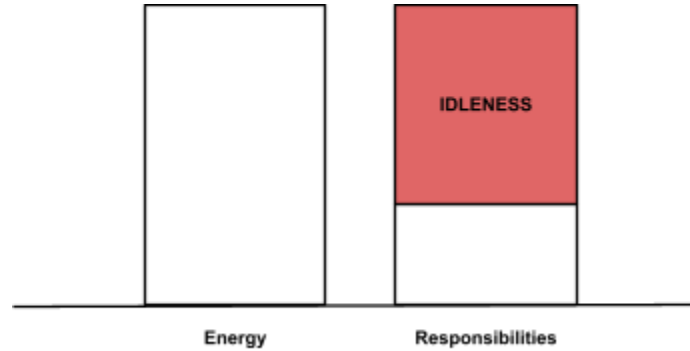


Chart 2: What happens is, because of sin we are pulled to not always want to use up our energy. So there is a gap. To say it how 2 Thessalonians 3 says it → we are able to work, but we aren't willing to work.

So we have excess energy, but it's not going towards good, productive God-ordained and given work and responsibilities.

So what happens? We become **busybodies**. That excess energy which is supposed to go somewhere goes towards idleness.



And this, church, is a dangerous place to be.

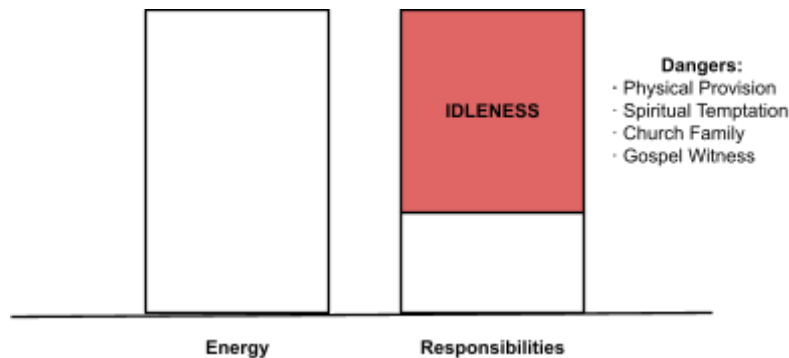
Idleness is not a good thing. You see we joke about it, right? We laugh at our laziness and idleness.

- **We make light of it.** We laugh about netflix binge sessions. We laugh about how we started watching the show at 10am on Saturday and we blinked and it was 10pm. And we all have a good chuckle.
- **We think laziness and idleness is a goal.** I just can't wait to have a whole week to do nothing. Not good, Godward rest, but idleness, laziness.
- **We really like having no responsibilities.** We love having having nothing on the agenda, nothing on the to-do list, sit back, relax. We strive for this. We work for this. We work, we do the bare minimum, so that we can do nothing → truly live.

Four Warnings for the Idle

Idleness is not a joke. Idleness is not the goal. **Idleness is dangerous.**

Paul says very clearly in 2 Thessalonians 3:15 → To the idle within the church - **15 Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.**



So let me warn us very clearly from the Scriptures about the dangers of idleness.

Physical Provision

Proverbs 14:23 - In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty.

Proverbs 10:4 - A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

What I'm not saying:

- Work hard and God will line your pockets. That's a prosperity gospel. That's harmful and dangerous theology.

- That if you're poor or struggle to make ends meet that it's because you're lazy. Lots of reasons for financial hardship. There are lots of people that work very hard and are still struggling, scraping by, living paycheck to paycheck.

But the Bible is clear, 12x in the book of Proverbs and elsewhere - that there is a correlation between our willingness to work hard and our ability to provide for ourselves, for our families, and for those in need within our church.

Spiritual Temptation

When you take our unused energy and add in our sin nature and flesh that is a recipe for spiritual disaster. Let me be clear - **we will spend our energy on something**. And when we're not giving ourselves to the right things, we will inevitably give our energy to the wrong things.

I remember growing up, especially during summers. My brothers and I would complain like kids do to my mom all the time - "I'm bored. There's nothing to do." Especially me. I was a brat growing up. That's a story for another time. Anyways, my mom would repeat this phrase to us all of the time - **"Find something to do because idle hands are the devil's playthings."**

Which is a terrifying thing to say to a 6 year old about their hands. I did some research it's an idiom that has roots all the way back with Geoffrey Chaucer in 1405 when he wrote - "The devil finds work for idle hands."

Cheesy, terrifying....and true. You have to give your energy to something, and if you aren't giving your energy to the good labors and responsibilities God has put in front of you, you are going to be pulled by the world, the flesh, and the devil to give it to things that are not of the Lord.

Probably the most clear Biblical example of this is the life of David and his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah. David, the king of Israel, goes 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 proceeds to use his power and influence to take advantage of Bathsheba, gets her pregnant, and then has her husband murdered to cover it all up. And in the story of the Bible, this begins a generational breakdown in David's family that takes hundreds and hundreds of years, and really the arrival of Jesus, to recover from.

Do you know how that story starts though?

2 Samuel 11:1 - 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.

David is at home, he's idle - he's not out doing what he is supposed to be out doing - going to war and leading his people as king. **He's entirely unburdened by responsibility and has energy to burn**, so he starts to lust after another man's wife and it spirals from there.

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.**

Church Unity

Idleness is dangerous to our church unity. Paul addresses this directly here in 2 Thessalonians 3:11 - **11 For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.**

You can also translate the word “busybody” here as a **meddling**. Being a busybody is when you **meddle**, or interfere or get preoccupied in the lives of others. You have excess energy to burn so you are way too involved in what’s going on with other people. *Which apparently was a problem in the church way before social media.*

When we don’t spend our energy handling our business, we start meddling in everyone else’s. Which most certainly leads to gossip, slander, and the like.

- “Can you believe she said....can you believe he did that....can’t understand why they’d raise their kid that way....can’t understand why she’d date him....”

Another way to say it is → **When we are not fighting the right things, we will start fighting each other.**

Listen, when you’re nose down, getting after it - laboring well, pouring yourself out for your family, your church, the Kingdom of God, your vocation - you don’t have time to mess around with all that “he said/she said” nonsense. Because you’ve got a mission from God, He has called you somewhere, you have a role to fulfill, you have responsibilities to handle, and you don’t have any excess energy to waste on foolish controversies and quarrels and bickering.

REALITY TV.

Sorry coworkers, I can’t gossip with you. I’ve got a job to do. I have to work.

Gospel Witness

1 Thessalonians 4:10-12 - But we urge you, brothers....to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, 12 so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

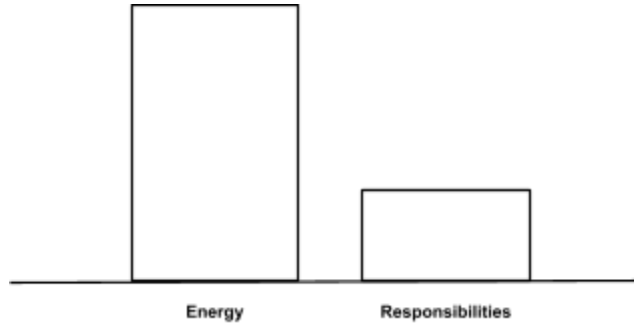
Part of how we put the gospel on display is through how we step into our various responsibilities.

Think about a workplace with a terrible work culture, or a team within your company where it seems like people don’t want to work, they aren’t getting after it, just a bad culture → That reflects back on the one in charge right? You start questioning the manager, the CEO, whoever’s the boss.

How we live out our duties in the kingdom of God says something about the King.

So we have to get what we talked about in week 2 - my job, whatever it is, if it’s good work - is a calling and summoning from King Jesus - so I’m going to work hard as if He gave me the role, because the Bible says that ultimately He did and how I work reflects back on Him.

The Call: Redemptive Ambition

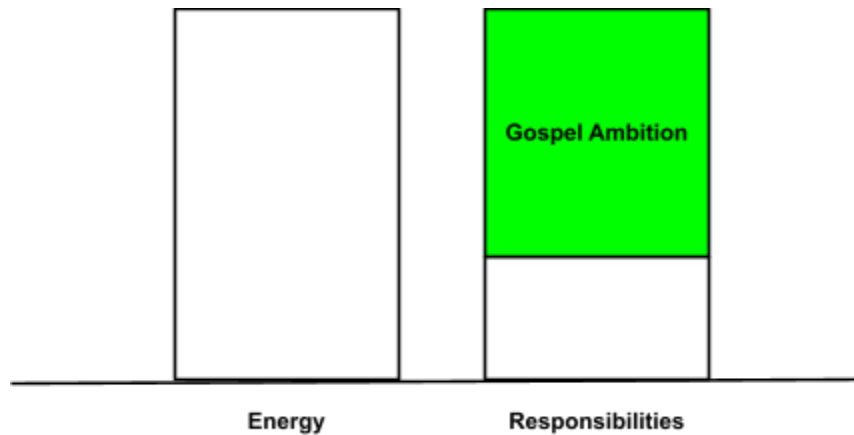


So if this is where we're at. Our responsibilities aren't matching our energy, we're pressed towards idleness. What do we do?

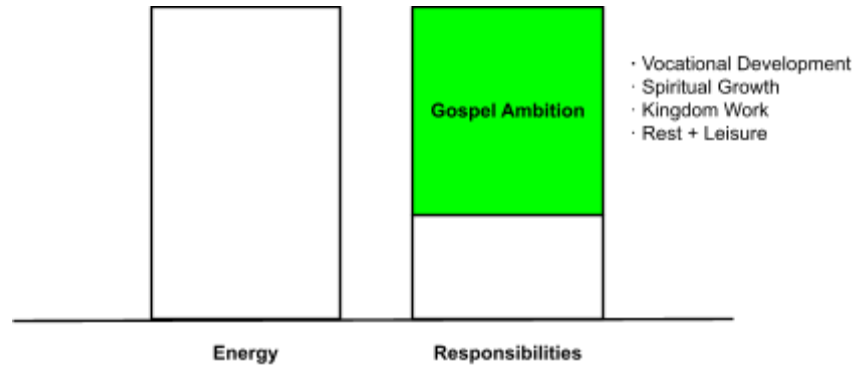
If this is where we find ourselves what do we do? Look back at 2 Thessalonians 3.

12 Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. 13 As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

We need **Redemptive Gospel Ambition**. We give ourselves to the work that matters. We pour ourselves out to the responsibilities God has in front of us. We need a gospel urgency where we pour ourselves out in our vocations, our jobs, our labor, we pour ourselves out for our families, we pour ourselves out for our coworkers, we pour ourselves out in good work.



We labor and labor hard, going for it for 6 days and then we stop and we rest and are refreshed in Christ then we pour ourselves out again. Christians should work hard, why? Because the Bible says our labor is a gift from God, that He calls us to it, so we labor well - when it's hard, when it's boring, when we don't like it, when we want to watch TV instead, when we are tired → we labor well.



What does gospel ambition look like?

Vocation development - learn new skills, take on side projects, grow in your craft, do good work. Be the best worker at your company. You are really meant to partner with God in taking the world somewhere. To take the raw materials of the earth and rearrange them to make life better for other image bearers. To join God in his purposes of one day healing all that sin has broken and restoring the earth and all God's people to glory.

Spiritual Growth - Read the Bible, pray, use that energy to grow in your knowledge and love for the Lord.

Kingdom Work - God intends to work through you to bless those around you. God intends to work through you to bring healing to others, to reconcile people to himself and to one another. To see broken people restored, children raised and trained and to see the world find forgiveness and true freedom that can only be found in Jesus.

Rest and Leisure - Then get some hobbies and rest well.

Gospel Conclusion

Let me end with this → Sometimes life is really hard. And I am doing my best, like, I'm really trying. And it's not enough. So all I want to do is just go lay on the couch and watch something because at least I can't fail at that. It always is harder to get things done than you expected it to be.

And if you're struggling with idleness, what you don't need from me is something cheap like - hey the Bible says stop being idle and lazy so like stop. Quit it. BAD! Go work hard! GRRR!

That's not gospel. That's behavior modification. It doesn't work and if it did it wouldn't matter because it's not the goal.

We need the good news of Jesus for our idleness.

That where we are weak, He is strong.

God created you for the vocation and responsibilities He has set before you. To step in and own the stewardships He has given you. And the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead now empowers you to step into the work He has placed before you with all the energy that He provides.

But we also need to remember and be refreshed in the fact that the most important work is already done. That we pour ourselves out because Christ first poured Himself out for us.

That we work not for meaning, validation, approval but from meaning, validation and approval given to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Don't misapply what we didn't say last week...your identity is secure if you're in Christ, but that doesn't mean your job doesn't matter, that doesn't mean you shouldn't care - "whatever it doesn't matter how I do..."

"Resting in the love of God doesn't squelch ambition; it fuels it with a different fire. I don't have to strive to get God to love me; rather, because God loves me unconditionally, I'm free to take risks and launch out into the deep. I'm released to aspire to use my gifts in gratitude, caught up in God's mission for the sake of the world. When you've been found, you're free to fail."

- James K.A. Smith

- I want to go back to school and get my masters but I'm afraid...when you've been found, you're free to fail.
- There's an open position at work but I don't want to upset people or get rejected...
- I don't know how to even start this whole disciplining my kid thing, I feel like I'm doing everything wrong...
- I want to quit and start this business or this non profit I feel like God's calling me into but I'm terrified...
- I feel like the Lord is calling us to plant a church on the east side of.
- Charlotte, but I feel unworthy and uncertain...

Our power and energy come from knowing that the most important work is already done. Jesus accomplished the work of salvation and grants it to us as a gift, received through faith.

Knowing that my work does not determine my worth gives me the strength that I need to step into my responsibilities, and fills me with the security that God will make up the difference as we pour ourselves out into the work he's given us.

That's what we remember everytime we gather....Communion.

Pray.