

# TUSCULUM HILLS BAPTIST CHURCH

Paul Gunn, Pastor

## A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF WORK

Selected scriptures

September 1, 2019

For public use: See non-copyright comments at the end of the message.

For today's sermon, I decided to take a break from the series on Abraham and recognize Labor Day by sharing some scripture about the topic of work. Today's message is a little more light-hearted than usual and I hope you enjoy it. I know many of you are retired but most retirees I know work more during their retirement than they ever did before.

Here are my four points:

- Work is all about perspective.
- Work so you can give.
- Work so you can witness.
- Work so you can enjoy the fruits of your labor.

**INTRODUCTION:** Friday, I stopped at a convenience store on the way to the church. The cashier asked me if I was ready for the three-day weekend. I said, "I'm a preacher so I won't get a three-day weekend." She understood, saying "You're always preparing for Sunday." She said she'd be working on Labor Day so she wouldn't get a three-day weekend either. I say that not to complain, but just as a statement of fact. I don't have weekend projects like a lot of people do. Many of you know I have a saying: "Sunday's always coming." That's true for preachers and for others on the church staff. It's all good though. I wouldn't have it any other way.

As I left the convenience store, I reflected on that brief interaction with the clerk. I looked back at my work experiences through the years. I am grateful for all of them. When I was a teenager, I had a lawn mowing business. In college, I did all kinds of things. I worked in two different restaurants one summer. For a while, I kept the night desk at Gibbs Hall, the athletic dorm at the University of Tennessee. My

hours were from midnight until 4 AM. I worked in the school cafeteria. I took a temporary job formatting floppy disks. Once, I roofed an A-frame house. Toward the end of college, I worked with youth at a church in Maryville while doing other odd jobs as well.

During my seminary years, I worked at a church while working as a small engine mechanic and a gardener. I painted houses. I cleaned offices. I have no complaints and no regrets about all the work.

I've served five churches and served in the military. I am no stranger to work. All the different jobs I had as a young man have helped me as an adult.

## **WORK IS ALL ABOUT PERSPECTIVE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Colossians 3:23

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters...*

This scripture was written by the Apostle Paul about Christian households, and this specific verse was written to bond servants, but the principle is universal. What jumps out to me in this scripture is the word “whatever”. This carries with it the idea that all work matters and all work is about perspective.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Regarding perspective, it's important to remember not all work is the same. My dad pastored a church in Tullahoma when I was in my twenties. When I'd go home to visit, there was a man in church who would shake my hand and comment that the skin on my hands was not rough and calloused like his farm hands. His perspective was that no one knew the meaning of work like him, and that's unfortunate. (He was kind of a mean fellow, and I always wanted to tell him that maybe one reason his wife had a permanent frown is because his hands felt like sandpaper! Instead, I just tried to avoid him and his little putdowns.)

Then there's the father who worked a job he didn't care for because he had a greater perspective. He had a sick son and his job provided health insurance. Some of you have been there.

**APPLICATION:** What is your perspective? If your perspective about work is getting up and just going through the daily grind, I challenge you to consider Colossians 3:23. *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord...*

If you work a job and just can't stand it, before you quit, I hope you'll consider your perspective. If you are working with all your heart as if you are working for the Lord and still dislike your job, don't stay miserable. Look for something else where you feel good about working with all your heart.

Not only is work all about perspective, it's important that you...

## **WORK SO YOU CAN GIVE**

In preparation for this message, I read the book of Ecclesiastes. On the surface, it's simple, but if you look closely it's NOT an easy book to understand. Solomon talks about the vanity of life and how almost everything is worthless. It's a rather sad and gloomy book written by Solomon. But there are glimmers of hope, all of them regarding work.

**SCRIPTURE:** Ecclesiastes 3:12

*I know that there is nothing better for men than to rejoice and do good while they live...*

The word "good" is a rather simple word, but if you tie it in with the word "do", you have "do good". In a passage talking about work and material things, we can clearly see that doing good, moral deeds with one's work is very much the spirit behind this verse. I read this verse in 28 English translations, and I believe it means more than "living the good life" in a material way.

I really believe we work, yes to pay the bills and yes to save, but I believe we also work to bless others' lives. I hope when you get paid, you are thinking of ways to

bless others. “Who can I help this payday?” “What difference can I make?” I’m not talking about giving a dollar, I am talking about real giving that will impact a life.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I know a man who squandered everything. He complained when his wife wanted to buy anything. She wanted a carport and saved for years from her own pension to buy one. For her husband, there was no sharing of money. He had his own money and squandered it. She on the other hand, had to pay for her own things, including anything she wanted for the house. The house was in dire need of repair and he refused to spend any money. You know what happened? She died first, and later he died. That’s what happens, people. We all die. His son inherited their money and home, and he enjoyed it. Had the man not been such a miser, he could have enjoyed his money with his wife and son. But no, driving a wedge between them and his money was really what he valued. Now, when people talk about him, they laugh and talk about what a miser he was. What a pitiful legacy!

**SCRIPTURE:** Ecclesiastes 5:17

*Everyone comes naked from their mother’s womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands.*

Let your model of work be like this:

- I work so I can give.
- I work more so I can give more.
- I work even more so I can give even more.

Let’s review: Work is all about perspective. Work so you can give. And...

## **WORK SO YOU CAN WITNESS**

Do any of you view your work as a way to share Jesus, or do you see yourself as just a cog in the wheel of a big industry? Whatever your job, if you are a believer in Jesus, then you are his missionary to others who work there. You have a sphere of influence that I do not have.

**ILLUSTRATION:** In Owensboro, Kentucky, there's a place called Mudd's furniture. They have a sign on the front of the store that says "Our business is to proclaim the Gospel. We sell furniture to pay the bills." You may think, well, it's easy to do that if you own the business, but what if you don't?

How do you share your faith on the job? Here's the answer: wisely.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I want to share with you two different approaches to witnessing in the workplace. A woman spent a lot of time aggressively witnessing to people on the job, and the HR department told her she needed to back off. She ramped up her aggressiveness and was fired by the company. In her mind, she left as a martyr. Now think about what happened. Because she refused to listen to the authority she was under, she lost any ability to witness to her coworkers.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I know another man who extended friendship to those of another faith who worked in his office. When he had the opportunity, he witnessed to them, but he was not aggressive, nor did he spend company time preaching. Interestingly enough, the manager of the company let the man go because he said his friendship with the others was changing the culture of the company, and he didn't like that. The man moved on to bigger and better things.

Hopefully, when you share Jesus with others it won't result in you getting fired. But if you find yourself like the man who was just being friendly and sharing as opportunity allowed, and you get fired anyway, rest assured God has something better in store for you. Don't be like the woman whose rebellion negated her witness.

Listen to the Great Commission from Jesus spoken to his disciples:

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 28:19-20

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

The Greek meaning of the beginning verse is “As you go into the world, make disciples.” It’s something that happens along the way— at work or anywhere. Passionate believers can’t help but share Jesus along the way.

Don’t forget your Christian witness as you interact with people as *they* work.

**ILLUSTRATION:** When gas was \$4 per gallon, I told the cashier at a gas station that at least paying for gas meant I didn’t have to walk. She said, “Thank you for saying that. Everyone is angry about the price of gas, and they are taking it out on me.”

If you eat out on Sunday, give a generous tip. I’ve heard waitresses say Sunday is their worst day because of cheap church people. Let’s be a better witness than that.

So... work is all about perspective. Work so you can give. Work so you can witness.

## **WORK SO YOU CAN ENJOY THE FRUITS OF YOUR LABOR**

In this book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon gives an overall gloomy life outlook. About the only positive things he says are related to the results of work.

**SCRIPTURE:** Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

*A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, <sup>25</sup>for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? <sup>26</sup>To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*

Jesus said in John 15:6 - “*You didn’t choose me, but I chose you that you would bear fruit and your fruit will remain.*” That means we were put here not to consume space and resources, but to be a blessing. A friend of mine said, “We are to be world-enhancers, problem-solvers, a blessing to those we’ve touched. We’re leaving something of Heaven (the Kingdom of God) everywhere we go and to everyone we encounter. So our work is the place where we get to be who we really are... ‘blessers’ who carry the destiny of Abraham (since by faith we are his

children.)”

It’s important to enjoy the labors of your work, whether you work for pay or volunteer for no pay. Enjoying the fruits of your labor includes taking time to rest.

**SCRIPTURE:** In Genesis 2:3, God said, *Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

**ILLUSTRATION:** An older friend of mine told me that when he was growing up, his father worked hard, but they never, ever took a family vacation. Instead, his father painted houses. His father completely missed out on enjoying the fruits of his labor because he was a workaholic. When my friend started his own family, he was intentional about time off with his wife and kids.

The idea of God resting is interesting, but it’s recorded in scripture for a reason. God put it there to set an example for all of us.

**CONCLUSION:** I Corinthians 15:58

*Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

Right before Jesus died on the cross, he said “tetelasti”. It is finished. The ultimate work of any person was Jesus’ work on the cross.

To preachers, teachers, students, and anyone else reading or using this message: I have posted this for all to use as you see fit. There is no need to cite me as the source. You are free to delete sections, add your own, or do whatever you want. There is no copyright. My request is that you do not copyright or sell my work. I am sharing my preaching notes in good faith with you because I know the challenges of putting together a lesson, especially when your week gets consumed with other things. Use it and enjoy!

I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at [www.thbc.com](http://www.thbc.com). Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn  
Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee  
USA