

INTRODUCTION

An oxymoron is the combination of contradictory words linked together. The plural of oxymoron is oxymora, so here are a few of my favorite oxymora: (1) jumbo shrimp; (2) pretty ugly; (3) working vacation (4) tight slacks; (5) Microsoft works; (6) humble Texan; and the one we're focusing on in this message: (7) lazy Christian.

You might have seen the news article from a couple of weeks ago that a Costco store in California was selling Bibles labeled fiction. Somebody Instagrammed a picture of it and it created a storm of biblical proportions. Many Christians called for a boycott of Costco. Costco apologized and corrected the label.

Some people think the Bible is merely a collection of old stories like Jonah and the Whale and Noah and the Ark. But those of us who know and love the Bible as the Word of God know that it is so much more. It's a very practical guide for living. Everything you need to know about how to live is found in the pages of this book.

For instance, our passage today speaks about the importance of working hard at a job. Since most of us have a job or have had one, or will have a job, it's very practical advice. At some time or another, you're probably going to have the experience of applying for a job. Be careful what you put on your application because you only have one chance to make a first impression.

Here are some actual statements from job applications.

1. I served as an assistant sore manager.
2. Education: I went to school on a fool scholarship.
3. I am very detale oriented.
4. I am a rabid typist.
5. I was involved in ruining an entire Midwest division.
6. Reason for leaving previous job: Pushed aside so Vice-President's girl friend could steal my job.
7. On a Federal Government job application, there was a question: "Do you favor the overthrow of the United States government by force, subversion, or violence?"
Apparently, the applicant thought it was a multiple choice question so they wrote: "Violence."

The theme of both first and second Thessalonians is that we have hope in a hopeless world. Our hope is found in Jesus Christ. Specifically, Paul encouraged the believers to hang onto this hope because Jesus is going to return. But apparently there were some believers who missed the point. They thought, "If Jesus is going to return soon, then the only thing I have to do is wait. I don't need to work, because Jesus is coming back soon!" So they became lazy Christians—and that's an oxymoron. A real Christian can't be a lazy person. So Paul concluded his second letter with some strong words about the dangers of laziness and the value of good, old hard work.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13. "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the

teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves as a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.' We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right."

From the beginning the church of the Lord Jesus has been sensitive to the needs of the hungry and the poor. We take seriously the passage where Jesus talks about feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. Then He says, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me." (Matthew 25:40)

The first crisis in the church in Jerusalem was caused by how the food was distributed to the poor widows. So, the church has always been an aid station for the hungry and the poor. But a problem arises when there are people who CAN work, but they choose not to work because they know they can get a handout from the church. That's the problem Paul is addressing here. The church took care of its own, but some of the members had stopped working to wait on the return of the Jesus. They became a burden to the church.

In his 1964 State of the Union Speech, President Lyndon Johnson declared war on poverty. He signed into law Medicare and Medicaid programs. He also signed into law the Food Stamp Act. In 2000 there were 17 million Americans using food stamps. In the last 12 years, that number has almost tripled to 48 million users. The cost of the SNAP program (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) costs taxpayers \$78 billion a year.

We all agree that there are millions of Americans who NEED welfare assistance. But the system lends itself to abuse. There are so many eligible programs, that some Americans have figured out that they can get by on government assistance, so there's no incentive to work. We have Americans who have a sense of entitlement. They think the government owes them something. We need to hear again the words of JFK who said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country."

Dr. Adrian Rogers had a way of looking at a complex issue and making it simple. Here's his take on people who feel that they are entitled to a handout. "Whenever somebody receives something without working for it, somebody else has to work for it without receiving it. The worst thing that can happen to a nation is for half of the people to get the idea they don't have to work because somebody else will work for them; and the other half get the idea that it does no good to work because they don't get to enjoy the fruits of their labor."

Let's unpack the truths we find in this powerful passage. Notice three principles about how followers of Jesus Christ should be diligent workers, not lazy Christians.

1. God values honest labor

Paul wrote, "We worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you." We know from Acts 18 that Paul had a marketable skill. He was a tentmaker. The believers in Thessalonica were poor, so Paul set up shop and made tents. He showed them the value of good hard work.

Most of the people living in the first century thought manual labor was undignified. Their poets and philosophers had a warped view of work. Homer (not Homer Simpson) wrote "the gods hated men and the way they demonstrated their hatred was to invent work and punish men by making them work." They thought hard work was beneath them. That's why they had thousands of slaves to do the heavy lifting.

Some Christians see work as a horrible burden. They hate their jobs. That's why Americans love to say TGIF. According to a Gallup Poll taken in June 2013, 70% of Americans hate their jobs or so are disengaged that they just try to make it through the day to get paid. Only 30% of American workers say they are really into their work. Monday rolls around for them and they are like Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh "Oh boy, another Monday. I have to go to work."

Even our songs talk about job satisfaction. The Mamas and Papas sang, "Monday, Monday. Can't trust that day." The Bangles sang, "It's just another manic Monday; I wish it were Sunday; 'Cause that's my fun day."

Some uninformed Christians think hard work was part of the curse God put on humanity after Adam and Eve sinned. But the Bible makes it clear that God put Adam to work in the Garden of Eden BEFORE he sinned. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." (Genesis 2:15)

God didn't curse Adam and Eve; and He didn't curse work. But God did curse the ground and from that time on Adam and Eve had to work harder. Now there were thorns and thistles to clear away before they could plant. There were weeds that grew, and working became a backbreaking, sweat-producing endeavor. Work is good, but the reason work is often hard is because we live in a sinful world.

All through the Bible, God commends the value of work. The fourth commandment was about taking a day of rest, but we sometimes miss the point of what we should be doing the other six days. God said, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work." (Exodus 20:8-9)

God says work is good. It's something we should do six days of the week. He didn't give us four rest days a week; He gave us one. Even though this message is a warning against laziness, we all know there are some people who are on the opposite side of the spectrum from lazy—they are what we call workaholics. I want to give a word of warning to the seven-day-a-week workaholics. You are sinning against God, and you are sinning against your family, and you are sinning against your body. God designed humanity to function best with a balance of work and rest. Take His Sabbath seriously.

You may be thinking that this message isn't for you because you don't have a job. You may be a student. There's another kind of labor beside manual labor, there's mental labor. And these principles apply to students as well.

The Bible teaches the value of good, hard, honest work. Legendary Football Coach Vince Lombardi said, "The only place success comes before work is in the dictionary." Thomas Edison said, "We often miss opportunity because it's dressed in overalls and looks like work."

2. Laziness is contagious; avoid lazy people

The Bible says, "We command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle." I was going to talk to you about the five symptoms of laziness but I was too lazy to look them up.

Did you hear about the world's laziest man? He found a magic lamp and a genie came out and granted him three wishes. The lazy guy said, "I want a horse, a sumo wrestler, and a squirrel." "Poof" they appeared. The genie said, "I've just got to ask you, what are they for?" The lazy guy said, "I'm tired of walking everywhere, so I want to ride the horse. The sumo wrestler is to lift me onto the horse so I won't have to climb." The genie said, "But why the squirrel." The guy said, "I need someone to go 'click, click' to start the horse." Now that's lazy.

We can laugh at lazy people, but a lazy Christian is a contradiction. Lazy Christians freeloading off the working believers in Thessalonica motivated Paul to use some of the strongest language we find in any of his letters. He said, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we COMMAND you." The word "command" was used when a military officer gave orders to his troops.

His command was to keep away from every believer who was idle and lazy. Doesn't that sound unkind? Not at all, Paul was using positive peer pressure. The church was a community, like a big family. But those who refused to work were creating a dysfunctional family. Paul didn't say kick them out of the church; he just said to stay away from them. There's a reason for that. If you hang around lazy people, you might catch what they have: Laziness. Laziness is contagious. Part of human nature is that if you do nothing, you'll always drift in the wrong direction. You have to actively drive in the right direction. I call this phenomenon the gravity of depravity. If you find a friend chilling out on the sofa eating Cheetos and drinking a Coke, you might have the thought that you need to pull them up to their feet and go work out. But if they decide to pull you down to their level it's a lot easier for them—they have gravity working with them—that's the gravity of depravity. That's why you soon find yourself chilling on the sofa with orange lips. Laziness is contagious.

The Bible says, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." No, that's not in the Bible. And if I ever get around to writing "No, that's NOT in the Bible EITHER" that can be one of my chapters. It doesn't appear in the Bible, but there's some truth to it. If your hands are busy working at a good job, there's not much chance for the devil to mislead you. Ben Franklin said something like it. He wrote, "It is the working man who is the happy man. It is the idle man who is the miserable man."

In the King James Version, laziness is called slothfulness. Sloth is just a lazy word for slowness –

with the “w” removed. In the Catholic tradition, sloth is considered one of the seven deadly sins.

When Europeans exploring Central America in the 16th century, they discovered a very slow moving tree-dwelling animal, so someone named it a sloth—and the name stuck.

Dr. Charles Stanley makes this observation about slothfulness: “Work is not a curse but a gift from God. The worker who never shows effort, energy, or enthusiasm is not living the godly life God created him for. In the Word of God, his approach to life is known as slothfulness. Slothfulness is a landmine with the potential to destroy all that we are and all that we seek to accomplish in this world.”

There are many verses in Proverbs that speak of the dangers of laziness. For instance, we read, “Idle hands make one poor, but diligent hands bring riches. Laziness induces deep sleep, and a lazy person will go hungry.” (Proverbs 10:4; 19:15 HCSB)

The Apostle wrote that lazy Christians were a double threat. They weren’t staying busy; instead they had become busybodies. He used a word in Greek that describes people who are always running around sticking their noses in everyone else’s business. A busybody is a meddler, a gossip, a troublemaker, and a scandalmonger. Know anyone like that? Chances are they’ve got too much time on their hands. Avoid those kinds of people, Paul said.

And his command to lazy Christians was blunt. “Settle down and go to work. Earn your bread. Because if you don’t work, you won’t eat.” Starvation can be a great motivation to work.

3. Our excellence at work should be an example to others

Paul explained why he made tents in Thessalonica. He wrote, “We did this... in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to follow.” He was trying to set a good example by working hard. As followers of Jesus Christ, we should be the kinds of workers and students that serve as an example to others.

My dad was a hard worker. He was a forester in South Alabama. He wore khaki work shirts and pants and boots every day. He drove a pickup truck before it was cool. He gave all three of us kids chores to do around the house. One of my jobs was to pick up the yard. I never could understand how our yard could stay so messy, maybe because dogs and kids roamed everywhere, and people burned their trash. He would come in from work and do an inspection. If I hadn’t done a good job, I had to finish it. From the very beginning he taught me, “Son, if a job’s worth doing. It’s worth doing well.” I’ve tried to carry that philosophy with me all my life.

That’s actually a Biblical principle. Paul wrote these words about how Christians should excel at their work. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” (Colossians 3:23)

Your job, or your school is the platform God has given you to serve Him. It is your ministry. The way you glorify God in your work or school is by working at it with all your heart. That means

that you should maintain enthusiasm in your work. The word "enthusiasm" comes from *en Theos*, which means "in God." The more "in God you are" and the more "God is in you" the more enthusiasm you'll display. Be honest. On a scale of one to ten, how enthusiastic are you about your job or your schoolwork? Enthusiasm will make the difference between mediocrity and excellence.

If you are doing your job and schoolwork for the approval of Jesus, you'll always do more than the bare minimum. In the time of Jesus, the Jews were under the domination of the Roman Empire. A Roman soldier had the legal authority to demand that any Jew carry his equipment for exactly one mile. The Jews hated to do this, and they bitterly counted each step. At exactly one mile, they dropped the load and said with disgust, "There! I've done what is required, now don't bother me anymore!" But Jesus requires a higher standard for His followers. He said, "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles." (Matthew 5:41) A Roman soldier would not soon forget the person who cheerfully carried his equipment the second mile. Are you a one-mile worker? Are you a single-mile student? Do you do only the bare minimum expected? Or do you go the second mile and leave the mark of excellence on your work? People will always remember second-mile-work.

Second-mile people always excel. Around 1920 a pharmacist bought a drugstore on the south side of Chicago. Soon, he was bored with his job and began to dream how he could make it more exciting. It was during a time when people were just beginning to call in their orders using a telephone, so this man decided to challenge himself to make his job more interesting. He decided to see how quickly he could deliver a telephone order. When someone called in, he repeated the order aloud, including the name and address. As he spoke with the caller, his assistant filled the order and a driver left immediately to deliver it. The druggist kept the customer on the phone chatting until the order arrived at the caller's home.

Most of the customers lived nearby, of course, but this kind of prompt service was revolutionary, and word soon spread. It became the busiest pharmacy in Chicago. He bought other stores and added new ideas like a soda fountain. Within a few years, he had a chain of stores. Can you guess his name? He was Charles Walgreen. Today, there are over 8,000 Walgreens because of a man who decided to go the second mile.

Charles Walgreen did this because he was a follower of Jesus Christ. He and his family attended First Methodist Church in downtown Chicago. When it was built in 1924, First Methodist was the tallest building in Chicago. Soaring 400 feet above the ground, there's a sky chapel built into the base of the steeple. It was built with money given by the family of Charles Walgreen.

The best way to show excellence in your work is to imagine that Jesus is your boss. Paul wrote that in the context of your daily job, it is the Lord Jesus Christ you are serving.

John Stott was a beloved British pastor and author. He wrote: "The way to serve the Lord in your job is to always imagine that you are working for Jesus instead of your boss. It is possible for the housewife to cook a meal as if Jesus Christ were going to eat it or to clean the house as if Jesus Christ were going to be the honored guest. It is possible for teachers to educate children; for doctors to treat patients; for nurses to care for patients; for lawyers to have clients; for shop

assistants to have customers; for accountants to audit books; and secretaries to type letters as if in every case they were serving Jesus Christ.”

So what would be different tomorrow, if you got up and went to work or school and said, “Jesus, today, I’m working for You. I’ll do my work or my studies with the sense that you are the One I’m hoping to please.”

CONCLUSION

God cares about every area of your life. He cares about your family life, your school life, and your work life. Your work matters to God. There is great value in honest, hard work. Laziness is a landmine that can destroy a person and anyone around that person.

I really loved Zig Ziglar; he had enthusiasm to spare, and he loved the Lord. He used to tell a story about a young couple lost on a country road. They spotted an old farmer, so they stopped the car to get directions. The man said, “Sir, could you tell us where this road will take us?”

With a twinkle in his eye the wise of farmer smiled and said, “Son, this road will take you anywhere in the world you want to go—you just have to keep moving in the right direction.”

Life is all about the journey, not just the destination. Are you heading in the right direction?

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes