

Introduction/Hook: Happy Labor Day Weekend wherever you might be watching. For many people, that means a day ‘off’ of work. I know one guy at Christ Church who says he boycotts the national holiday and he works on Labor Day so it’s not a day off for everyone.

History of Labor Day: It is not just the symbolic end of summer and start of school, it is not just a great excuse for a picnic, a parade or a block party. In the late 1800s, it was common to work 10-12 hours a day, 7 days a week. 1st and 2nd grade kids might work a full day alongside mom or dad in a factory and the family barely scrapes together a basic living. There was no Disney+ or cell phone plan considerations in the budget. Many immigrant workers had no protections and toiled in unsafe work environments... labor unions formed to counter the power of the wealthy industry leaders and formed strikes or rallies to protest the poor conditions, renegotiate hours and pay.ⁱ

Labor Day is a product of the Labor Movement of the 19th century and was officially a federal holiday in 1894. Just 8 years before, the city of **Chicago** played a major role in the movement as a protest turned deadly when a bomb was dropped that killed police and protesters - The **Haymarket Riot/Memorial** remains a few blocks from the Ogilvie station where you can learn more.

I am not interested in navigating the tensions of the 19th century labor party voices vs. corporations or business owners, although I think economic theory and government regulation matters. I am not here to provide a history lesson on why the 40hr work week is less than 100 yrs old and that the reason you think a 10 year old should be in school instead of cleaning up at a job site is a fairly recent cultural phenomena.

What I want to look at today is a small passage of Scripture in the NT, **where the apostle Paul is teaching a church how to please God in every area of their life.** He mentions a few things about what that means for their “working lives” and we want to see what God tells us about how we are to inhabit His world as workers. Work is his idea - even his gift to humans - and I want to look at few things in this passage that I hope challenge and encourage you.

First, let me read I Thess 4:1 & 9-12

¹As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

⁹Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, ¹¹and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹²so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

I want to spend the rest of our time together looking at "3 Shoulds" and "2 Reasons"

*1) we should **live every square inch pleasing God***

*2) we should **let love guide our work***

*3) we should **ambitiously work for God.***

Close with 2 reasons that we should live/work this way

*(pause) First***3 qualifications before we go forward*

1) You might be asking yourself – are you serious is this guy really about to tell this North Shore audience they need to be working ambitiously? That's like telling a bird it needs to fly or a golf ball it needs to slice - isn't that just what happens in this community – **isn't the problem learning how to stop working** instead of start working? Stop allowing our work to define us and our status to be on our job title... Well, yes – "overwork" can be a problem too, that is another sermon. Good instinct – it is a way to not please God. Today is more about "underwork"

2) Are you really talking about this when the current **unemployment numbers** show a million people a week are out of work?... Glad you asked, this instruction is not intended for those who want to work and cannot. It is for those who can work but are not contributing. Lots of people right now want nothing more than to be working.

3) Finally, **What does Paul/I mean by 'work'?** What I don't think Paul means is simply employment - he is not referring to a paycheck so if not officially employed, you are still in view here. That could be because you are retired, you are in school, your health situation, you are taking care of other humans - parents, kids, the sick...etc.

I will continue to use the word “work”, but I mean contributing, making things, volunteering, serving, adding and not subtracting, please hear me saying ‘contribution’ (not employment or paid work)

With those 3 qualifications, let’s go:

1) We should live every square inch Pleasing God

4:1 brothers and sisters, we instructed you *how to live in order to please God* and he goes on to talk about 2 intimate aspects of life (sexuality and work) that go back to the very first instructions of God to humans:

-Genesis 1&2: Creating babies and expand (be fruitful)

-there is an intent to sexual relationships in vs:3-8

-Genesis 1&2 Tend the Garden. Creating goods, services and relationships, meaning (art, beauty, song, etc.)

We are focused on the 2nd instruction—work the ground. The work we do fits into the life God has designed to be pleasing to him. You were made to work. Some of you are going to have to spend the rest of the morning wrestling with that claim – you are going to have to examine your Monday through Friday and ask if it has anything to do with God. Others, you believe this deeply and have a life without compartments – a life of congruence in every area.

A fairly famous quote from **Abraham Kuyper** says, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!” (2x)

It can be fairly easy to think about God on Sunday, but more difficult on Monday. Maybe Monday for a short time to start the day in prayer or Bible reading, but what about the rest of the day. There was a recent study that the research group **Barna** conducted that examines this idea of how people’s work life is impacted by their faith—specifically, they came up with three personality types in their findings, they call them “vocational personalities” among Christian workers.

1. compartmentalizers— faith does not strongly connect to work

2. onlookers - slight or occasional connections between faith/work
3. integrators – deep connections between faith/work

The research shows that the smallest group of people see a deep connection between work and faith.

compartmentalizers =34%

onlookers = 38% (notice most people are in the middle)

integrators = 28% (every square inch)

The correlation of the study was the deeper the faith the higher the sense of purpose, direction, make a difference in world, life satisfaction For our purposes this morning, I want to make sure that we don't jump into the call to work without seeing its roots in vs.1 'live in order to please God' (all of life)

This has not always been as hard “to integrate” as it might be for us today. In her book “Work: The Last 1000 Years” Andrea Komlosy gives historical context and explains, summarize quote: “The industrial revolution shifted control over global commodity chains to the western European countries, centralizing industrial production in mechanized factories. Mechanization brought wage labor out of the house and workshop and into the factory, contributing to a completely new experience of what it meant for many people to “go to work “ⁱⁱⁱ She continues, “Only after 1900 would this narrowing of the conception of work to gain for employment outside the home finally become dominant on a global scale” (not life on the farm, in the factory)

Life was no longer seamless, but lived in compartments and needed to be integrated. Today, work is changing as rapidly as ever in history... Only having a job for a few years, working for various companies, working from home, changing states or communities quickly, gig work, displacement of long-standing valued possessions from organizations or companies... Coronavirus has likely accelerated the pace of change in the field of work. How's that for a positive Labor Day outlook? ;)

My point is every square inch, no matter the context, should be devoted to God (Sunday and Monday)

2) *We should let love guide our work*

vs 9 – a life pleasing to God is one that is growing in Brotherly love. (I’m going to be short on #2)

Love is the launching pad for this entire section or “This is the way love acts”ⁱⁱⁱ

If you go back and study the larger context of I Thess. This section flows out of Paul’s prayer in chapter 3:12 “may the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else” then he follow it up in 4:9 by saying “for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other”

3 audiences for Paul –

- 1) You are doing this (keep loving);
- 2) Do this all the more (increase your love);
- 3) Not all of you are doing this (start loving)

Joel Manby won the respect of America with his appearance on the CBS reality TV series Undercover Boss, he was a highly successful corporate executive. He was the CEO of SeaWorld and SAAB and prior to that at Dollywood and Silver Dollar City... His book Love Works, **asks the question, can you actually make a profit in business and love others?** Deals with questions some of you deal with – do quarterly results hinder the ability for you to truly value your employees? He is working out the principle of love in the business world. He argues that love is a harder way to lead, but that it is a better way to lead – it involves truthfulness and patience, kindness and trust...

The reason I bring him up is not so that you can be on undercover boss one day and write a book, but because I think it is important to see an example of someone trying to apply their Bible (his book is I Cor 13 on love) to their work life. I don’t know him personally so hate to hold him up as an example, but I love that he is trying to integrate his faith and his work. He is trying to have every square inch of this world submitted to Christ.

What we love most drives our work lives as well. If we love others most, you can tell. If you love money most, you can tell. One pastor explained our moment this way:

‘Amazon is the new temple. The Visa statement is the new altar. Double-clicking is the new liturgy. Lifestyle bloggers are the priests and priestesses. Money is the new god’. It is no wonder Jesus said what he did about the love of money!^{iv}

Set up #3 – need for work: Paul frames work as an action of love. These Christians have deliberately given up working/contributing, which is a breach of love. (see II Thes 3 for more context) These are matters of relationship, not a rule or regulation. (Say this 2x) Not working was an act of not loving others.... #3

3) We should **ambitiously work for God**

READ Vs. 11 Make it your ambition: Lead a quiet life, mind your own business, and work with your hands (this is all one thought, not 2 as the NIV suggest with colon)

Ambition: a wholehearted - industrious life,

This statement feels like an oxymoron - ambition is stirring up action/energy/activity/agitation, then he says quiet lives, which seems like the opposite of ambition

John Stott says “**A person’s ambition is what makes him ‘tick’**; it uncovers the mainspring of his actions, his secret inner motivation.”^v

*Thessalonica was an important trade-hub during 1st century, it even became capital for all the Greek provinces. Due to the city's key commercial importance, a spacious harbour was built by the Romans. Money and power and influence were brimming over in the growing influential city.... Silicon valley home prices. Their view of ambition would be different than the Jesus way....

“Many think of ambition as nothing more than the drive for personal honor or fame. As a result, ambition—the God-implanted drive to improve, produce, develop, and create—is neglected and well on its way to paralysis.”^{vi}

Ambition needs #2 – it must be motivated by love and it needs ‘quiet life/mind own business’ or falls off rails.

Quiet life does not mean introverted and shy, but rather a practice of restraint from foolish speech, quiet - means don't be a troublemaker mind your own business

Mind your own business

It is likely that they have stopped being busy and become busybodies with this extra time (see Paul's comment on II Thess 3:11), meddling in other people's matters - on social media all day commenting, critiquing and complaining, not creating anything of value.

Work with Hands (this is the real controversy for 1st century followers)

Cultural assumptions about what role in society you have/should have

-This instruction, work with hands, is also very counter culture (just like what he says verses above about sexual behavior - loose 1st cent context: sex was an act of worship in the temples)

-Greeks despised manual labor-it was beneath them. They conquered other cities and used their power to have others do this work, whether working class or slaves. Some kinds of work are more degrading than others (information work vs physical labor)...

-Jews had always seen manual labor as good - God hands in dirt, Abraham and Moses - shepherds, king David shepherd: Jesus took on flesh and worked as a carpenter, Paul & Timothy made tents.

Easy to do the same today: Overly adopting cultural values... If money = chief value, only do high paying jobs and only want kids to go to schools or study degrees that will pay them well...

We have to allow the Scripture to interpret what we absorb from the culture - you should not have an unfiltered engagement with news, media, business advice, cultural values should be shaped by God

Ex. 1 Someone who can take a stick and hit a little ball and make it go in a hole in the ground (golf) in a good weekend tournament can make 50 years worth of working as a librarian. If societal values, money = value, the golfer is as valuable in a weekend as someone teaching kids to read for a lifetime (Extreme example)

Ex 2. Sweeping the street in NYC is Bringing order out of chaos.... making the world livable for fellow citizens. Imagine if no one cleaned the bathrooms or picked up the trash on the streets of NYC for 2 weeks. Sickness and disease and chaos would reign down.

1. I will not adjudicate these societal assumptions, but I do want to call your attention to the fact that you carry assumptions - mostly unspoken - about the value of people's work or lack of work.
2. Allow your values to be shaped by God, not society and treat people accordingly.

2 reasons are given for why this type of life is pleasing to God (Both seem to be corrections to false way of living - idleness and busybodying) and are not received by some

1. Win the respect of outsiders

What is a Christian like? and only judged them based on their contribution to society - how they work, are they excellent or shotty, or they diligent or lazy, are they arrogant and quick tempered or humble and strong? **Are they guided by love?**

- 2. Do not be dependent on any** Misapplying biblical teaching... they had a good Bible verse to defend their motivation

It is not as simple as just throwing a Bible verse at something. You have to read the whole story, understand the context of Scripture, walk with God in such a way that you know the heart of God, and be willing to learn from others (importance of small groups doing life together)

Some people are saying - with a great "spiritual motive" that due to their faith Jesus will return they don't have to work. Ex. Sermon on mount – see how God feeds the birds, don't worry. And I say amen, why don't you wake up at the crack of dawn and fly around all day looking for worms – they don't start playing chase until they have done all their chores. God hides the worms in the grounds and takes care of them as work (not worry)

The message translates 5:1-3 You know as well as I that the day of the Master's coming can't be posted on our calendars. He won't call ahead and make an appointment any more than a burglar would.

Garden to city as a theological move and affirmation of tech work or information age as well as the trades of manual/physical labor

Wrap up with how communion is a meal that is the result of work It is not grapes and grain, but bread and wine. It is also a family meal where it shows that all are under the blood of Christ, no matter your status in society, no matter your title or lack of tile, your volunteerism or your bank account. There is a great leveling that happens at communion.

ⁱ See History.com – on Labor Day for more context

ⁱⁱ Andrea Komlosy, *Work: the last 1,000 years* P.3

ⁱⁱⁱ Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, IVP TNTC

^{iv} John Mark Comer, *Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*

^v Stott, *The message of the Sermon on the mount*, *InterVarsity*, 1993) 160 172.

^{vi} Dave Harvey, *Rescuing Ambition*