

Message: Vocation
Sermon Series: Second Mountain
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2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

God is at work in Genesis 2. Even before sin entered the world, God gave Adam the assignment to work the ground. God's call upon human beings is we have the privilege to work. When sin entered the world in Genesis 3, the nature of work changed. What had been joyful became hard. Nevertheless, Nehemiah is a great example of a person called by God to go to work (repairing the walls of Jerusalem). The Good Samaritan modeled a great work ethic. The story of Martha complaining to Jesus about her idle sister, Mary, follows. The Apostle Paul stressed work and not idleness. When inspired in our work, great things are accomplished. The story is told of a reporter watching Mother Teresa of Calcutta as she cleaned the maggot-infested wound of a homeless man, only to say, "*I wouldn't do what you do for a million dollars.*" As the story goes, she replied with a wry smile, "*I wouldn't either.*" She felt God called her to her role.

I feel called by God to ministry as vocation. My brother, on the other hand, is a Christian in the workplace who is not called to pastoral ministry. His call is every bit as legitimate as mine. Christians in the workplace are to live out good values. However, those who pay our salaries don't pay us to be good people – they pay us to get the job done. Good attitudes/behavior + productivity is a package deal. I like the quote in "The Second Mountain" (p. 127): "*Work is the way we make ourselves useful to our fellows. 'There may be no better way to love your neighbor,' Tim Keller put it, 'whether you are writing parking tickets or software or books, than to simply do your work. But only skillful, competent work will do.'*"

APPLICATION: Look up the definition for "work" and for "vocation." What is your vocation? How does your "calling" apply to where you are today? Would you say your vocation brings meaning to your work? Why or why not? Who has been your mentor? Who are you mentoring? On page 139, Brooks wrote, "*The best advice I've heard for people in search of a vocation is to say 'yes' to everything.*" What should you say "Yes!" to?

INTRO: We are talking about David Brooks' book, The Second Mountain. In it, he says that "significance" trumps "success" and that significance leads to joy, not merely happiness. He says significance is based on 4 pillars: Vocation, Marriage, Faith/Philosophy and Community. Today we look at the first of these: vocation.

Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica (Greece) as they experienced persecution (mention United in Prayer) and to explain about end times (Jesus' 2nd coming). The Thessalonians had a problem with some Christians being **idle**. They refused to work. Maybe some thought work was unnecessary because the end was at hand or they were just being lazy and took advantage of the generosity of wealthier Christians. They weren't inactive – they were active – but were destructive & disruptive. Paul wrote to instruct the church about meddlers. He minces no words. He references that he personally worked hard (his trade was a tentmaker).

2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 (pg. 1176)

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. 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. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

Paul said it in a more positive way for the church in Colossae. **Col 3:23-24**

*Whatever you do, **work heartily**, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

The 1st time “**work**” appears in the Bible is in Genesis 2. **God** is at work. God works for 6 days. God ceases to work on the 7th day (“sabbath”). Almighty God is a worker! To the ancient Greeks & Romans, the Hebrew God was totally unlike their gods. Our God is a worker. Their gods were various forms of the 3 Stooges. Their mythological gods frolicked and fought, engaging in leisure, games, love and war. The Hebrew God worked – He stuck His hand into the ground and created Adam. Then God gives Adam work. Sin doesn't enter the world until Genesis 3. Work isn't cursed! The ground is cursed! Adam actually worked BEFORE the fall! The fall didn't curse us with work. It cursed the ground, and made our work less productive, less fulfilling, than it had been. God has work for us to do. Brooks makes a distinction between “work” and “Vocation.” Vocation comes from the Latin word, “a call” or “summons,” is often linked within the Christian faith as

if “God has called me to this occupation.” It is a fit. It seems natural and life-giving. We enjoy it.

I’ve had an Israeli bus driver, Egal, since the late 1990’s. He works hard, is conscientious, professional and helpful. He loves and takes great pride in what he does. One year I had another driver, I’ll call “Tommy.” He was the opposite of Egal. He had an attitude & drove aggressively. He was not helpful to our folks. He got into an argument with our guide. The last day of this trip, Tommy told me that before the “Intifada” he was a successful restaurateur. Once the suicide bombing started, he lost it all. He said, “I never thought I’d be doing this.” Egal loved bus driving. Tommy in the same role – hated it. Tommy saw his job as “work.” It was a transactional – I’ll do this for this wage, and get paid. Tommy is not a bad person – but he saw work as a transaction and not as a relationship with people. Egal sees his role as a vocation. The outcomes are completely different.

My little brother, Allen, is now in his mid-50’s. He spoke at Abiding Harvest UMC on our mother’s 88th birthday on July 14th. He spoke about Christians at work. He is not a minister. I got a degree in theology at ORU – his was in Biomedical Engineering. I went to seminary – he got his Masters in Biomedical Engineering from the University of Virginia. I got a doctorate in theology – he got an MBA. I’ve served as the pastor of 5 congregations – he started at Hillcrest (Kaiser Rehab). He’s now the President and CEO of Methodist Healthcare in San Antonio (10 hospitals, over 11,000 employees, and over \$2.2B in annual revenue). This healthcare system serves San Antonio and all of South Texas. Allen doesn’t own it, but he runs it. When Allen spoke at AHUMC he said he grew up hearing in church that the only people “called” into ministry were the preachers and missionaries serving in a church. They were the ones called into FULL-TIME ministry. Allen asked: *Was God only (or more) pleased with my brother’s career than mine? Is Tom’s career more valuable in God’s eyes than mine?* If you answer “Yes!” then let your thinking be transformed! God has called ALL of us to work in all industries, across generations and geographies, across educational and socio-economic levels, for His glory! You may be building or selling homes or selling cars or insurance, running power lines, doing physical therapy or manual labor, driving a bus or running a hospital,. All of these can be “work.” But they can also be vocations, plus just about any profession, desperately need Christians who are CALLED to work in the marketplace.

In the Bible, we are ALL called! We are called to follow Jesus! God calls us into relationships. God calls all of us, to give all of ourselves, to Him.

Col 3:23-24 *Whatever you do*, Don't think that God only cares about work when it's pastoral or church-related, and that He isn't interested in what you do. He is! Your work matters to God! **work heartily**, *as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.* **Work heartily/hard**. God has chosen to leave work for us to do! He left some things undone, so that we could participate in fulfilling all that His creation could become! He didn't create a perfect world for us to relax in. He created a perfect world and put us here to make it better! God wanted us to experience fulfillment by making something better. The same principle is in effect today, and it's what happens when you go to work. We are able to be His agents who help to help healing and restore when we are in the marketplace and do our work as unto the Lord.

3 special audiences:

- 1) **Young** people usually have less authority/responsibility. One thing Allen did that helped him move up the career was he told his bosses: *"I can always do more for you."* And he did it well.
- 2) **Single parents** have it tough on both ends today. Working and raising children is challenging for two parents – it is far more difficult with only one. The church can help
- 3.) **Retirees** – you have a great opportunity to **work heartily**. There's no such thing as "retirement" in the Bible. We need your active engagement in helping others follow Jesus. The goal of life = when we're old we'll have 2 things: Wisdom accumulated through the years + someone to share it with.

Witness at work. We're in relationships where we should share Jesus whenever we can. That is our job as disciples, even though it's probably not in the job description. Allen doesn't hire people to be Christians – he hires them to do the job. If they do the job, then they have credibility in their witness. Allen told the AHUMC congregation that since we graduated from WRHS there a lot of HS grads who have ambition and good character but little opportunity. The job market in San Antonio has under a 3% unemployment rate. Anyone who wants a job can work. Allen's company had a problem with employee retention. If Taco Cabana would pay \$1 more, they'd leave Methodist Health Care and go work for them. He went to one of the of school superintendents in SA and said, "If you send me kids with good character, I'll not only hire them and pay them the normal rate, but we'll pay for their college education, too. They can be part-time employees." Allen said in July it was 37/38 who've they've partnered with they've retained. He said it's over 60 now. He's having lunch tomorrow with another SA

school superintendent and he thinks his company can help 100 kids per year have a job and get their college education paid for. That is significant. That is a witness.

In conclusion: Don't minimize your work. Don't make it too small. Don't make work too big – don't worship work – worship God. Have a life beyond it. Work can become too important, all-consuming and can become an idol. Our true identity in Christ.

What commitment do you need to make? Are you seeking employment? We have a ministry that helps people who are unemployed. Are you unhappy in some way with your employment situation? There are people who you can talk to about this. Are you retired and looking for engagement? There are numerous ways for you to find meaning through our ministry. Are you looking for ways to improve, grow, learn, get better? Build relationships

Give your life to Christ. Life is all ab. RELATIONSHIPS. This = most important one. As we come to communion today, let's make our prayer for Christians to be fully and meaningfully engaged in the workplace.