

Never Tire of Doing What's Right **II Thessalonians 3:11-13**

Have you ever been reading the Bible when a phrase you've heard all your life leaps off the page...and you say to yourself, "So that's where that saying comes from?" Well, it wouldn't surprise me at all if this happens to you right now as we look at our text.

II Thessalonians 3: 11-13: 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.

Interesting thing about reading the Bible: not only do we find these familiar phrases, we usually don't have to read very far to also find ourselves. Take today's Scripture, for instance--where do we see ourselves in this passage?

Are we the people who never tire of doing what's right?— hopefully so! OR, are we the "bustybodies" who, when you think about it, could not possibly ever get tired from doing *what's right*?!?

On this Labor Day weekend, a time when we traditionally say our goodbyes to summer and also pay tribute to our work, it seems an appropriate time to consider what the Bible says about the best ways for you and me to stay busy.

Paul holds up for us the ideal of becoming people who "**never tire of doing what's right**" (v. 13). I know people like that, and so do you. They're such a blessing to the rest of us. Hopefully, we're at least a bit like this ourselves—in that we seek to do what's right.

But there really are some people who seem to do this all the time! May the Lord richly bless those "Energizer Bunny types" who keep going and going..."doing what's right." May their tribe increase!

Anyway, we'll get to those "do-gooders" in a moment; but first, let's consider the "do-badders"—and what I mean by this is:

I. THOSE WHO NEVER TIRE OF DOING WHAT'S WRONG.

Paul refers to them as BUSYBODIES. There's that familiar term! Who's Paul talking about here?

Well, Paul was using the term in the same way we do today--to refer to people who have too much time on their hands and, because of this, they get involved in unproductive, at least, or perhaps even destructive activities. More specifically in terms of what was happening in the church at Thessalonica, Paul was directing this word toward those who...

A. MAJOR ON MINORS. In his first letter to them, Paul had discussed the second coming of Christ. In his second letter, he deals with this theme again, but with a different emphasis. It seems that some of the Thessalonians were focusing all their time and energies on this one aspect of Christian faith.

They either believed that Christ had already returned, or that His return was imminent. They were spending their time reading the latest *Left Behind* novel and speculating about what it all meant rather than doing what followers of Christ needed to be doing no matter when the Father decided to send His Son back!

This had gotten so bad in Thessalonica that some of them had stopped working. They were no longer earning a living for themselves and their families, and no longer able to help anyone else who may be in need.

"Why bother?" they reasoned. It doesn't matter. Christ will return soon anyway and we will have no need of the money we earn or the things it buys.

Well, as you might imagine, this was causing a real problem in the church. It was severely testing the patience of those who continued to work and earn a living.

With nothing productive to occupy their time, these misguided Christians were interfering with the lives of everybody else. The Thessalonian church was suffering from too many busybodies!

This, of course, led to another problem. Those who were spending their time worrying about the second coming rather than being involved in productive labor had to...

B. MOOCH OFF OTHERS. In other words, they had to ask other members of the church to supply them with life's basic necessities because they were not working and earning these things for themselves. They could work; they just chose not to.

Well, the Apostle Paul's heart went out to these fellow believers who were refusing to work, and he gently reminded them of this little rule: **"If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (II Thessalonians 3:10).**

Remember: Paul was not talking to people who had been laid off from their jobs, whose businesses had closed in a time of economic downturn, who were unable to work due to illness or injury, or who for any number of other reasons had found it impossible to work for a time. The Bible speaks clearly of helping those who are in need due to circumstance beyond their control.

Paul was speaking to able-bodied people who were choosing not to work. He suggested that hunger should be a strong motivator for them to start doing something productive. The Bible, in both the Old Testament and New, speaks of labor as every person's responsibility. So, those who can work, but choose not to, ...

C. MISS THE POINT (about work). In verse six, Paul commands the Thessalonians **"...to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us."** Paul was well-schooled in the Scriptures. He knew what the Bible teaches concerning work.

For many people, the only reason for working is to earn money. Earning a livelihood is important, of course; but this is not the only reason we should work.

In the very first book of the Bible, we learn that God works and that He created us in his image to also work. Some people mistakenly believe that work entered the world when man sinned, but that is not what the Bible teaches.

Sin brought problems to the workplace, to be sure; but when God placed the man and woman in the Garden, He instructed them to take care of it. At the very outset, God gave them a job to do.

No person can experience fulfillment in life unless he or she is doing something productive--something that will benefit not only

themselves, but the lives of others around them. We are to go about our work life with a sense of contributing in some way to the common good of our community.

Listen to the overwhelming witness of Scripture:

1) Ecclesiastes 4:5: "A fool folds his hands (behind his head) and ruins himself."

2) Proverbs 26:14: "As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard (lazy person) turns on his bed." The lazy person is attached to his bed like a door to its hinges.

3) Earlier in Proverbs, we read, "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise." (6:6) Are there any lazy, unproductive ants? Not the ones that show up at my picnic!

4) I Timothy 5:8 says that if a person does not provide for his family, "he has denied the faith..."

5) Ephesians 4:8 tells us to work so that we will have something to share with those in need.

6) And listen to Colossians 3:23: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord..." In other words, do what you do as if Jesus Christ himself was your supervisor.

Think for a moment: if the Lord was your immediate supervisor, would it change how you work--the quantity of your work--the quality of your work--the attitude with which you do your work? Well, He is—and giving what we do our best is part of our Christian witness.

Oh, but you say, my supervisor treats me like I'm some kind of slave! Well, if you look at the third chapter of Colossians, you will find that Paul was talking to real slaves when he instructed them to do their work as unto the Lord. They were not to use their circumstances as an excuse for giving something less than their best.

This is why the Bible takes a dim view of gambling—it's an attempt to get something for nothing--to get rich without doing anything to earn it. God wants us to grow and mature as people, and productive labor is one of the means He uses in this process.

In the kind of environment in which we now live, we need to be very intentional about what we understand personally and what we communicate to our children about work. I don't believe children need a lot of time on their hands with no plans of accomplishing anything productive with that time.

My father could always find a job for me to do. It didn't matter if it was Saturday morning or the middle of the summer, sleeping late was not permitted. Only once did I try to stay in bed by using the argument that I would have nothing to do if I got up!

But something else about Dad: I cannot remember him ever complaining about his work--whether it was his job or something that needed to be done around the house. Nor did I ever hear him yearning for retirement. He embraced work as an important part of life, and he set a good example for his children.

Parents, our task is to raise productive people, not busybodies--children who get the point of work and understand it as a necessary, helpful, and God-ordained part of life. This being the case, let's turn our attention now from the busybody-types who seem to have an unlimited capacity to do what's wrong, to...

II. THOSE WHO NEVER TIRE OF DOING WHAT'S RIGHT.

Everyone thinks they are busy today. Busybodies will be the first to tell you that they're busy; but that doesn't mean that they're doing anything worthwhile. I want to suggest to you three characteristics of people who are busy "doing what's right." First of all, they...

A. MAKE A LIVING. Since it's Labor Day weekend, let's begin with this. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he worked hard while among them--he earned his living; and in **verse 12**, he commanded those who were so preoccupied with Christ's second coming, to "**settle down and earn the bread they eat.**"

Paul was talking about earning an income--making a living. It's important enough that the subject occurs many times in the Bible. We go to school to prepare to find good employment. We work 40, 50, 60 hours a week to earn money. We study how to manage it, and we decide how to spend it.

Sometimes we worry that we won't have enough of it. Sadly, money has become the most common source of marital conflict today. Losing money has caused some to commit suicide. Lusting after money has led others into a life of crime.

We cannot ignore the importance of money. God certainly doesn't avoid the topic--there are 2,000 passages in the Bible dealing

with money. People who are good stewards of their money will spend some, save some, and give some away.

But before we can do that, we must earn some! We must make a living. Any person who understands his need to work and goes about his work **“with all his heart, as working for the Lord” (Colossians 3:23)** will add value to whatever enterprise he’s part of; and in time, if his employer is wise, he (or she) will be rewarded accordingly.

We have a responsibility to make a living. But as a counterbalance to making a living, we must also...

B. MAKE A LIFE. Now, this is not to say that making a living cannot be part of making a life. Much of life is devoted to the workplace, so learning to work with intensity and integrity, with a cooperative attitude and a can-do spirit, is vital to living a full and satisfying life.

Still, our work should never become all that we do or our only source of identity. Work can be addictive, and instead of it being a means to an end, it becomes the end in and of itself.

Work can become a way of gaining power and control over other people; or of having so much money that you can get anything you want whenever you want it; or it can be an attempt to fill some void in your life--a sense of worthlessness, meaninglessness, low self-esteem.

But that’s asking your work to do something for you that it simply can’t. Any feelings of power, control, meaning or self-worth you achieve through your work, and only your work, won’t last.

The only way to break that addiction is to know the God who loves us as we are, who doesn’t require us to impress Him--not that any of us could--in order for us to have worth and value in His eyes. We cannot earn God’s love and acceptance. We can only receive it as His gift.

God wants you and me to experience life in abundance--and that involves more than just a good job or a successful career. If He has blessed us with a family, He wants us to spend time with our spouse and children. God wants us to have a close walk with

Him. He wants us to be involved in things that will enhance the life of the community in which He's placed us.

Which brings me to a final point about people who are busy "doing the right things": they...

C. MAKE A DIFFERENCE. In the workplace, in the home, in the church and community, they make a positive difference. They take to heart Paul's advice: **"As for you...never tire of doing what is right."** And this relates to everything we do.

Actually, we may find this verse a little intimidating. "NEVER TIRE of doing what is right?!?" Fact of the matter is, some of us stay tired most of the time--because we seem to be DOING something ALL the time.

Maybe so much doing is not right. Maybe some of it's wrong. We wear out ourselves and we wear out our families. We're not suffering from a lack of doing, but an overabundance of doing!

When we talk about work or any of the other good things we do from a Biblical perspective, we dare not forget that the God who worked to bring this world into being also let us know that on the seventh day, He rested! God took a Sabbath.

As persons created in the image of God, we are to work, be productive, do good things. But like our Creator, we are also to rest. For if we do not find times for rest and relaxation, we WILL TIRE of doing what is right. And that's wrong.

For many of us, the first place we need to make a difference is within ourselves—and this is the challenge I want to leave us with today—the challenge:

- 1) to find a better way to balance our responsibilities,
- 2) to discover a more Christ-honoring approach to living,

so that even as the busy people we are, we will still manage to "never tire of doing what's right."

Invitation No. _____