# Work and Do Not Weary!

A sermon preached by Pastor Chuck Cole 11/17/19 at St. John’s UMC Staunton, VA

# 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

### Warning against Idleness

**6** Now we command you, beloved,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+65%3A17-25%2C+2+Thessalonians+3%3A6-13&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29668a)] in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+65%3A17-25%2C+2+Thessalonians+3%3A6-13&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29668b)] living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+65%3A17-25%2C+2+Thessalonians+3%3A6-13&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29668c)] received from us. **7** For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, **8** and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. **9** This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. **10** For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. **11** For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. **12** Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. **13** Brothers and sisters,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+65%3A17-25%2C+2+Thessalonians+3%3A6-13&version=NRSV" \l "fen-NRSV-29675d)] do not be weary in doing what is right.

Last week the Lectionary directed us to the book of Haggai where the Jews of Haggais’ day, who had returned to rebuild the temple in 539 B.C., had not yet rebuilt it 19 years later. Among the reasons for their failure was discouragement as they looked at the ruins of the temple, looked at their numbers and resources and said we cannot rebuild the temple to the Glory that it once was and so we will not even try. God sent the prophet Haggai who said.

“take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, 5 according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear.”

He called them to work and trust him to bring Glory to himself through faithful work. He says he will make the glory greater and he did.

Our lectionary this morning brings us another passage about people who are not working as they should. In Thessaloniki, some of the Disciples of Christ, were not working, not taking the active part that they were called to as part of the community. These particular people were not only failing to contribute but they were frustrating the work of the church.

The early church functioned as a community of interdependent people; it is clear from the letters of Paul that they gathered for preaching, teaching and worship. They supported resident and traveling preachers, teachers whose job it was to attend to the preaching and teaching of the word. They also supported fellow Christians locally such as widows, orphans and others who could not support themselves by common meals at which all were welcome. They supported Christians farther afield by giving to relief efforts for Christians in other places. They also reached out taking care of the poor outside the church, nursing the sick and feeding and clothing the hungry and rescuing and raised abandoned infants. They also witnessed to their friends and neighbors about the Gospel along with the especially gifted Evangelists who they supported. This all required generosity in financial giving as well as of time, energy, hospitality, witness etc. For a church community to be healthy everyone had a role to play and needed to participate with enlivened generosity.

In Thessaloniki, sadly, there was a group of believers who would not work, even though they could, and failed to contribute financially and in other ways. Despite this they took advantage of the generosity of others. For example they ate at the common table without contributing which drained resources meant for the poor and weakened other ministries of the church for lack of support.

They also not only failed to contribute but were busy bodies. The play on words here which does not come across as well in English basically says “they were not busy working but busy making sure others did not work.”

They tried to convince others to join them in not working or contributing and they interfered in the work of the church by instigating problems and divisions by their words and actions.

Maybe they were the type that complained about challenges the church faced but refused to do anything about it. Perhaps they talked badly about others in the community or maybe the leadership but offered no solutions themselves. Perhaps they were just persistently negative. We do not know for sure.

Their failure to work and their active frustrating the work of the church was a huge problem. It was such a problem that Paul forewent support he was entitled to and worked making tents while he was in Thessaloniki to set an example for them.

The situation is so extreme and persistent he says that these people should not eat, they should not be allowed at the common table. They should be treated with love but it should be made clear to them that their behavior is burdensome to others and to hopefully open their hearts to the need to be an active part.

Reflecting on this passage I have to admit that to some degree the same spirit makes itself known in the church of today. Usually in less virulent forms.

I myself in the past have been guilty of a version of this unfaithfulness.

As a young adult I came on Sundays to worship, I attended the young adult group and my weekly small group but I did not contribute financially in any meaningful way remotely proportional to my income or needs. I enjoyed the ministry of the church but did not contribute to the budget of the church that paid the salaries of the people ministering to me that maintained the building and paid for the mission and benevolent program of the church. I also did not as a rule give my time or anything else. I did not actively bad mouth or intentionally frustrate anyone but in my failure to contribute there was ministry which could have been undertaken but was not.

Financially it was because I did not learn a pattern of giving.

Another part of it was my personality. I just did not know what to do and I did not want to do the wrong thing. So I did nothing at all.

I expressed this to a friend and she said Chuck you are a sail boat sitting on land and waiting for the wind to move you. You are not going to get anywhere that way. You need to get in the water so the Spirit can direct you.

That image struck home and so I sought out opportunities to give and be involved in the work of the church and that made a huge difference.

I still need to seek out ways of placing myself in the way of the wind of the Spirit or else I can become discouraged and weary of doing good.

If you find yourself not contributing as you might place yourself in the way of the Spirit.

This might be by joining in an existing ministry that speaks to you and you see as valuable. Here at St. John’s maybe you could join the choir, or be a teaching substitute for Sunday School, or help with the Family committee. Be bold volunteer move if you are not.

In Choosing the Faithful Path this last Monday we put groups and events on the Calendar and created teams in various areas of need. We will be having an opportunity soon to sign up for each and every person to join a team working on a new ministry or to develop a vision, or improve communication among other priorities. When this opportunity comes get in the water so the Spirit can move you.

Placing yourself in the way of the Spirit might be in increasing your financial giving. Perhaps you have depended on others to give financially in the past but are able to give more than you have. This might require a change in spending priorities but I need to let you know that the age of being able to depend on others to fund the church has passed each of us needs to give generously.

As we give faithfully especially when it feels like others are not it can feel wearying.

Our scripture calls on us - Do not weary in doing what is right - the Apostle says. As we give and work let us lean on God not comparing ourselves to others but rejoicing in the Apple Trees we plant.

If you are wearying in doing what is right here are a few thoughts.

Adopt an attitude of gratitude. Give thanks to God for the ways you are being used and rejoice. Open your eyes to see the blessings and give God thanks.

Actively seek out people to help you in your work and make empowering others part of your job. Ask for help whether you think you need it or not. Let me say that again, this is not something I am very good at, ask for help whether you need it or not.

If you find yourself wearying becoming tired and maybe slowing surround yourselves with encouraging people to lift you up. If you are not tired still do not try to do it on your own. Another important thing is to make sure you have Sabbath Rest. Make sure you have the rest you need to revitalize yourself and your ministry.

Let each of us join in the ministry of the church faithfully rejoicing in the opportunity to serve the Lord with each other.

In all of our efforts let us work faithfully and trust God for the fruit. Let us not grow weary but seek opportunities to serve. Amen.