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**DENOMINATIONAL BROADCAST
OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES
OF AUSTRALIA**

LEARNING TO WORK

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need.

Ephesians 4:28

Are you having trouble keeping a job? Are you having trouble finding a job? Are you having trouble enjoying your job?

If you are having troubles like these, you are not alone. Many people never stay at a job for very long because no matter how good a job looks at first something always comes up, and rather soon they either get laid off or they find what they think is a good reason to quit. And if that's their problem, it's probably also true that they are having increasingly more trouble finding a job when they are out of work. Employers are often reluctant to hire people who bounce from one job to another. And with all this, there's good chance that they don't really enjoy working.

I am wondering how it is with you. What about your work-are you employed? Do you enjoy what you are doing? These are very important questions because most of us have to work-if we are reasonably healthy, that is. Sometimes our work keeps us at home, as it does for many mothers who have great responsibilities within their household. In any case, a good deal of our life is spent working, or possibly avoiding work.

So you see, the work question is very important, something like the question of health and the question of food. If a person has the necessities of life, good health, and a job he enjoys, he will be happy isn't that right? But if one of these is missing, a person will experience a certain amount of distress.

If you would have to say that you are one of those who moves from one job to another, and that the time spent between jobs is getting longer all the time, and that you never really enjoy working, I just want to ask you if you have ever thought that perhaps you

have never learned how to work. Learning to work that's very important. Many people have never learned how-it's as simple as that-they have never been taught. Many parents do not make sure that their children learn to work, and because of this they miss some of the most solid of human satisfactions.

Parents must teach their children how to work. And that's not because children are naturally lazy, not at all. Children often spend hours doing things they want to do. But the energy, the interest, the skills, and the talents of children must be molded and directed. Parents are responsible to emphasize to their children that work is necessary and honorable. They must help them to see that work involves getting up in the morning and spending several hours of applied activity in a single job. They must teach their children the importance of promptness and responsibility. They must show them precisely how to do a job well. If they want their child to cut the grass properly, they must show him how to do the job without leaving strips of uncut grass. When cleaning the house, they must take the time to show their child how to sweep a room without missing the corners, and how to wash a window all the way to the edge. If a man has a trade, or is a farmer, doing some of his work at home, he should take the time to show his children what he is doing, and he should show them some of the smaller details involved in doing his job efficiently and well.

What happened in the life of a young boy I knew is an example of what I mean. At the age of thirteen he was hired by a farmer to hoe tomato plants. He had never used a hoe before in his life, so he chopped away with vigor, but with very little skill. The chopping action destroyed some weeds, but unfortunately it also sliced through many of the plants he was supposed to be protecting. Moreover, the chopping action was slow, and it took forever to do a row. The result: he was fired.

Undaunted, the boy set out to look for another job. Another farmer asked him, "Can you hoe?" "Oh, yes," said the boy, "I've had experience hoeing." "Okay," said the farmer, "I'll start you out hoe-

ing beans. But I am fussy about the way my beans are hoed. I'll show you how I want it done." He showed the boy how to file his hoe to make the edge razor sharp. Then the farmer took the boy to the field and showed him how to slide the hoe through the soil and leave a small hill of loose clean dirt around each plant. Well, that boy became an expert, and he worked for several years for that farmer, hoeing innumerable rows of beans and tomatoes and corn. The farmer was pleased with the boy's work. Why was his work acceptable? Because a kindly man had shown the boy exactly how he wanted the work done.

So I say there is good chance that you never learned to work because nobody ever took the trouble to teach you. There are less and less of these kindly farmers around these days, it seems, and parents are often unwilling to take the time to teach their children. Sadly, many children never have the opportunity to work with their parents, possibly because they don't have parents; or they don't have parents who are interested, or they have parents who are so specialized in their own work they couldn't possibly teach their children very much. There are all kinds of reasons why people never learn to work, and so you shouldn't be surprised if you might still need a few lessons yourself. Don't be ashamed if you've never learned; it's never too late to learn.

If you think that one of the reasons you are not very successful in your work may be that no one ever taught you how to work, why not start out by looking at your present job and asking whether or not you are sure you are really doing it the right way? Has your employer taken the time to explain to you exactly what he wants from you, and if there are certain specific operations you are required to perform, are you sure you are doing your job right? Let's say you are a receptionist for a large firm. That's the kind of job that might be given to a person who has a nice personality and who makes a good appearance. Fine. But has anyone ever told you exactly what is expected of you? If not, you should ask your employer to do just that. Perhaps you should ask for time to visit someone who is doing an outstanding job with

another firm. The same kind of approach applies if you are a salesman, or if you are driving a delivery truck or building houses. Be sure that you are doing your job right, the way it should be done, and if no one ever taught you, make sure someone does as soon as possible.

Here's another suggestion for you: if you never learned how to work when you were younger and now you are having trouble holding a job, try to find someone who is doing a good job for a company, spend some time with him, and ask him questions about his approach to his work. He may point out some very simple things to you that will enable you to do a better job. He may point out, for example, that if you are one of those people who likes to stay up until all hours of the night, you are going to have to change that during the working week. Just a simple tip from a person who knows how to do a job could be worth a lot to you. With assistance like that, you will soon become one of your boss's better employees, and you will not always be the first to be let go when business slacks off.

Learning to work—each of us has to. And in this connection it is important to remember that our ability to work is also related to our religion. Now some people might think this is nonsense. They think that work is what one does during the week, and religion is something one "does" on weekends. But this isn't true. In fact, the way we perform in our work is related to the way we think about ourselves and about the world and about God.

Yes, it is. Have you ever met someone who is proud that he is able to get by without doing very much work? He works for a while, and when he is laid off he lives on unemployment. Or he is a welfare recipient and shouldn't be, and he is proud of it. Or he is a freeloader on the job. He works in a steel mill, let's say, but in fact he does very little. His seniority is enough to keep him from getting fired, but he is a lazy loafer. Now, if you talk with a person like that, he is apt to say that he really doesn't give a care about his fellowman, he wants to get as much from his employer as possible, and he tends to feel that the

world owes him a living. That, you see, is a religious position because it involves the man's view of himself, of other people, and of society.

In contrast, the religion of the Bible is a religion that will help people become better workers. Even before a person goes to the trouble of finding some one who can teach him how to work, he has to want to work. He has to want to be useful. He has to want to support himself and not be a burden on others. And wanting to learn to work is rooted in religion.

In Ephesians 4 in the New Testament there is a very helpful sentence showing that the religion of the Bible should lead to a productive and satisfying life so far as work is concerned: "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need."

The Christian faith, you see, is a faith that summons people to honest work. And, if I may say so, one of the reasons so many people are never taught to work, and never learn, is that they have drifted a long way from the teachings of the Bible. The Lord Jesus Christ came so that His followers would become new creatures—better men and women. In the power of His Holy Spirit, they were equipped to live meaningful, worthwhile lives. The greatest apostle, Paul, was a tentmaker who often used his skills to support himself. He is the one who writes the words we have noticed, bringing together the ideas of stealing and working and giving. Biblical history is full of working men whom God used to accomplish His purposes. I could tell you about them, and I could cite numerous sentences from the Bible that urge people to work. According to the Bible, we are in the world to work. Those who know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord know this is so.

"Let the thief no longer steal"—this is the way the sentence from Ephesians begins. This was written to a very young church made up of many new converts, and some of them were slaves. Now, it was expected that slaves would steal. They didn't really have to, for they were generally pretty well taken care of. But

they stole nevertheless. This circumstance provided the occasion for Ephesians 4:28—to point out that when it comes to work there are really two alternatives: a person is either a thief or a worker. From this we see that the matter of learning to work is a moral problem. If a person never really learns how to work, he will become a thief. He receives his food, clothing, and shelter at someone else's expense.

Understand that what I have said applies to able-bodied people. I am not talking about the sick, nor about the young, nor about the aged. I am talking about people who can work, but they have never learned how. Those who do not work, steal. They may never rob a bank or do anything else that is legally criminal. But they need clothes and food and shelter and medical care just like everybody else, and if they do not work, they are going to have to take these from other people, without working to acquire these necessities. And that is stealing. A society can not long exist if many of its able-bodied workers do not work, but steal instead. Aside from these dire consequences, think of what never learning to work does to a person. Such a person becomes a freeloader, and freeloading is stealing. The Bible always reduces human problems to their simplest form. Those who can work but who never learn how are thieves. You certainly don't want to be a thief, do you?

It is also interesting to notice that the Bible says in Ephesians 4:28 that we shouldn't steal, but we should work with our hands. What does this mean? Does it mean that a person shouldn't be a banker? Or a person shouldn't be a teacher? Or a salesman? People like those don't work with their hands, do they? Does it mean that the Christian religion favors manual labor exclusively?

Well, we must remember that when Ephesians 4:28 was written, most work was handwork, and modern machine operations were done by hand then. Take farming for example. Farming has become highly mechanized, and it demands the development of a host of technologies so that one man and his machines can farm a mammoth tract of land. When the Bible was written, each of the operations now

done by irrigation pumps and sprinklers, tractors and earth-processing equipment, harvesting—each of these had to be done by hand. So the phrase "working with one's hands" meant simply that a person was required to participate wholeheartedly in the work that needed doing. He was not to stand aside while other people got their hands dirty and calloused. He was to take part. He was to do his share.

So this means that each of us is required to do his share, too. This means that we have the responsibility of examining our work to see whether it is really productive. Am I really producing something that can help humankind? I must ask this. So must you. We are all required to learn to work because there is a job to do. We must be willing to put our hand to the work that confronts humankind today. We must be willing to flex our muscles and to help in getting the job done.

Not everyone is required to use his hands as he works. But the emphasis on the use of one's hands is very important nonetheless. There are many legitimate forms of work nowadays that require very little hand power. But there are also many kinds of work, ways of making money, that require no use of hand power and that also do very little economic good. Those of us who do not work with our hands have a special responsibility to examine our work to make sure that it is really worthwhile, to make sure it is really helping humankind.

Furthermore, there is evidence that nowadays the highly sophisticated development of technology, designed to spare man the necessity of rolling up his sleeves and getting to work with his own hands, is becoming counterproductive. The energy crisis that presently threatens Western civilization is directly related to man's reluctance towards using his own hands and back and legs and to his preference of using machines.

It could well be that energy shortages in the future will require us to use the strength of our own bodies much more than we now do. The Bible's emphasis on handwork must not go unnoticed, and it may be

much more significant than we are prepared to recognize right now. One thing is ~~learning~~ to work involves a willingness to pitch in and to help in accomplishing man's work, using the strength God has given each one of us. Each of us is required to examine his life to make sure that he is doing something useful with his strength.

Ephesians 4:28 also tells us why we must learn to work. We must learn to work so that we can give to those who are in need. This is fascinating, isn't it? According to the Bible we can divide up society into three classes of people: thieves, workers, and needy. The needy are people who for one reason or another cannot work. They are children, the sick, the mentally incompetent, and the aged. Thieves, of course, must be eliminated from society, and they are to be eliminated by teaching them to work. The needy exist in society with every right of every other citizen. They should not be despised. They themselves should not be embarrassed by their plight. No one should try to destroy them through abortion, infanticide, or mercy killing. Those who are healthy work to supply themselves and the needy too.

So often the goal of hard work is described in terms of monetary gain. But Christian workers know that they work to supply the needs of people. Even those who for one reason or another experience exceptional financial gain in connection with their work know they are stewards who are required to use their financial power in order to alleviate the distress of the needy.

Oh, it is a redeeming gospel that we find in the Bible! This is the way the Bible is. It calls for human virtue, for diligence, and for applied energy, but it does so in order that social life may be enriched by the seasoning of compassion and sacrifice. Learning to work—how important it is!—but you know and I know people who work themselves to death just so that they can enjoy luxury and power and security. Men and women enslaved by the possessions they have acquired are among the most pitiable spectacles in our modern world. But those who work in order to give are beautiful people.

What about you? Have you learned to work? It's never too late to learn, you know. If you are having trouble keeping a job and enjoying your work, find some help. Don't be too proud to ask for help if you sense that something is wrong. If you don't learn to work, you'll most likely learn to steal.

With all this, I invite you to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you see now how the religion He has founded is so very helpful even when it comes to something as practical as learning to work? Before you can learn to work you must want to. And when you see yourself and your life and your world in the light of Christ's revelation, you will want to.

We are all sinners. You are too. You should confess that this is so. And then you should believe that when Jesus died on Calvary, He died to pay for the sin of people just like you. Ask Him to cover your sin with His blood. Read His Word, the Bible. Become a member of His church. And Jesus will teach you ... many things. He will even teach you how to work.

PRAYER

Lord, help me-

*To love some one more dearly every day,
To help a wandering child to find his way,
To ponder o'er a noble thought and pray,
And smile when evening falls-*

*To follow truth as blind men seek for light,
To do my best from dawn of day till night,
To keep my heart fit for His holy sight,
And answer when He calls-*

*And then my Savior by and by to meet,
When faith hath made her task on earth
complete,
And lay my homage at the Master's feet
Within the jasper walls-*

This crowns my task. Amen.

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